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THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING

AND OTHER STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

BY

J. WARSCHAUER, M.A., D.Phil. 1869

THE MAN THAT WANDERETH OUT OF THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING SHALL REST IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE DEAD.—*Prov.* xxi. 15

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TO THE

REV. J. BRIERLEY, B.A.,

THE WISE AND GRACIOUS TEACHER,

THE "SPECULATOR IN LIFE'S HIGHEST VALUES,"

AS A SMALL TOKEN OF

GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION

"Deines Geistes
Hab' ich einen Hauch verspürt."
UHLAND.

N16818

PREFACE

THE sermons composing this volume were preached on successive Sunday mornings to a city congregation in the industrial North of England. They are now printed practically as they were delivered, with few except verbal alterations, no attempt having been made to change their original form; it was felt in every way better to retain the direct mode of address, and even to leave an occasional colloquial phrase unreplaced by its more literary equivalent. References to such events of the day as the loss of the *Titanic*, the war in the Balkans, etc., have likewise been allowed to stand; and these, while disclosing the date of the book as surely as the year given on the title-page, will not, it is hoped, be found disturbing by readers.

The author's aim has been to re-emphasise and illustrate some of the truths for daily living gathered in the Book of Proverbs, in their application to the life of to-day, and in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; if he be found to have succeeded in his re-setting of these ancient gems of wisdom, which have lost none of their lustre in the flight of the centuries, he will feel justified in offering this sheaf of practical addresses to a wider audience.

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THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING

I

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
—PROV. ix. 10.

WE are about to commence a series of studies in one of the books of the Old Testament which has perhaps received less than its share of attention at the hands of preachers, and that in spite of the fact that it provides a veritable mine of material for the pulpit—the Book of Proverbs. When you look at the opening verses of this book in your Bibles, you find it described as "The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel"; but you must not take that title too seriously or literally. If these thirty-one chapters contain any genuine sayings of Solomon's, we cannot identify them; the overwhelming bulk of them belong with certainty to a far later age, and are of the most varied authorship, though popular fancy loved to attribute all these pithy counsels and pungent reflections to the great king whose splendour and wisdom formed one of the favourite traditions of the Hebrew people. As a matter of fact, we have in the Book of Proverbs something much better and more interesting than the production

of any one single mind : just as in the Psalms we listen to the voices of many singers expressing the devout aspirations of all Israel, so these hundreds of maxims and aphorisms give us in collected form the proverbial lore, the practical wisdom, of the whole Jewish nation, a popular compendium of popular philosophy, distilled from many minds.

This book forms part of what is known as the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrews, because of the stress it lays upon the worth of wisdom, the necessity for it, its sovereign claim and virtues : " Wisdom is the principal thing," " With all thy getting, get wisdom," such are the exhortations constantly addressed to the reader, while in the great eighth chapter Wisdom is personified as standing at the meeting of the paths uttering her invitation to all : " Receive my instruction, and not silver ; and knowledge rather than choice gold."

What is this wisdom ? let us ask first of all, so as to make sure of our bearings. Is it a kind of secret doctrine about the nature of God, speculations concerning the universe or the human soul, glimpses into hidden mysteries or the final consummation of the ages ? No, there is nothing mystical or visionary in these chapters at all ; the atmosphere is clear enough for most accurate vision, yet not too rarefied for the most ordinary mortal to breathe. There is nothing abstruse, nothing metaphysical in Proverbs from beginning to end—it has no affinity with the dreamings of the farther East, where the soul loses itself in rapt communings with the Infinite. The Hebrew mind is nothing if not concrete ; just as Jesus Christ threw all His principles into story form—because there is

nothing so "telling," in the true sense of the term, as a story—so, *e.g.*, where we should say "Union is strength," it comes natural to the Hebrew to express the same idea in the phrase, "With two dogs they killed a lion." Instead of an abstract notion you get a vivid picture—and it sticks: you *see* the two dogs getting the fierce lion under by a concerted attack, whereas, singly, they would have been no match at all for the huge brute.

So in the present case, I repeat, the "wisdom" of the Book of Proverbs is no speculative affair, but practical to a degree—it offers advice as pointed as that shrewd book "Letters from a Self-made Merchant to his Son," which you probably know. It is, if you like, not a heavenly wisdom, but a wisdom of this world, dealing with the art and science of life; and I suggest to you that it is not to be despised on that account, for the business of living calls and enthrals us all, the problems of living present themselves with unfailing regularity and urgency to each one of us, and like importunate messengers decline to stir from our doorsteps without an answer. To-day's task; to-day's trial; to-day's dilemma; to-day's struggle; to-day's opportunity—they will not any of them wait until to-morrow to be dealt with, and delay merely aggravates the trouble we want to avoid or stave off. Really—let us be quite frank—you can get on just a little longer without a completely satisfactory solution of all the theological or philosophical problems that may be of interest to you; but in the meantime life itself has to be lived. You may not have settled the question of freewill in theory; you have got to settle it fifty times a day in practice. Some of our clever men

at the Colleges have recently made the discovery that the *teachings* of Jesus do not matter much—it is some theory *about* Jesus, on which unfortunately they are not agreed, that is all-important: well, we tell them to get on with their theory, but not to hurry themselves unduly, because for us commonplace mortals, who have not their learned leisure, the teachings, the practical precepts of the Master, are still good enough —in fact we find them indispensable. The need of everyday humanity is for everyday religion—never mind the mysteries and the subtleties. As Paul said with great candour and great good sense: "I speak with tongues more than you all: howbeit in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue"—*i.e.*, in a language not understood by the people. Preaching that does not *help* average people in their day-by-day lives is worse than superfluous—it is a pretentious nuisance; I select this Book of Proverbs for preaching about on Sunday mornings because it drives at practice all the way.

Not only so, but its exhortations and reflections come straight home to men's business and bosoms; they appeal to the large unchanging factor in our composition. The other day you amused yourself and impressed your youngsters by telling them of all the things that did not exist when you were their age —no telephones, no phonographs, no motors, no typewriters, no aëroplanes, no wireless telegraphy, no cinematographs—"why," you wound up, speaking more to yourself than to them, "we're living in quite a different world nowadays." No, you are not. Nature

and human nature are the same, and between them they make up ninety-nine per cent. of the world—the rest is only trimmings. If you want to feel how essentially identical human nature twenty-five centuries ago was with the human nature of to-day, in spite of all the dizzy rush of inventions and the rest, read the Book of Proverbs, and see if it does not find you. Our little lives are only short lengths cut from the same old fabric nature has been weaving and delivering to order all the while: there are the same human relationships, the same necessity of earning a livelihood, the same temptations of appetite, the same fine possibilities of exercising our foolishness, the same cares of household and business, the same disappointments overtaking the pleasure-loving, the spendthrift, the slothful, the same solid satisfactions attending a temperate, serviceable, laborious, God-fearing life—and what lies beyond it, in God's hand. And whether you write 1000 B.C.—the approximate date of Solomon's reign—or 19— A.D., does not make much odds.

So we can go to these ancient deliverances on the wisdom of life, and put our questions: On what principles is life to be conducted? On what terms is it to be lived? In what way is the maximum of personal happiness to be extracted from it? Is the highest wisdom a prudent selfishness, a careful regard to one's own interests? Or again, may not the true philosophy be this, which we read expressed in one of the Apocryphal books: "Short and sorrowful is our life; and there is no healing when a man cometh to his end. Our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no putting back of our end. Come,

therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that now are. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds ere they be withered, because this is our portion and our end is this"? Alas, this materialistic philosophy has been tried again and again, and always failed, always ended upon a note of despair. Live as though the world held no higher content than material gain or material pleasure, and we are bound to find it a woefully unsatisfactory place; try to minister to our own egoism, and though we be the most successful egoists, we are bound to finish with the disgusted confession of Ecclesiastes, declaring all things vanity and striving after wind.

No, but the principal thing for those who would make a success of life is wisdom, and that not in the sense of mere worldly prudence, but a recognition of the true basis of our individual existence and the order of the world; and the very beginning of wisdom, we read, the first condition of living aright, is the fear of God.

The words of our text are among the most hackneyed in the Bible—which means they are among those which are habitually uttered with the least thought. Let us look at them rather more closely for once than is our custom. We do not hear so much of the fear of God nowadays as was customary in former generations, and in many ways, perhaps in most, that is a good thing. We have ceased to believe in those presentations of God which drew a picture of a perennially frowning, perennially enraged tyrant, perpetually angry with man for something man could not help, viz., his descent from Adam—a circumstance for which, if anybody, God was responsible, and not His hapless creatures. Why,

under the circumstances, God, who must have foreknown the Fall, should have felt this wrath against the unfortunate offspring of Adam, and should have required an innocent Victim to suffer before He could forgive men the misfortune of their birth, was one of the many puzzles the barbarous theology of the past made no attempt to solve—instead of arguing, it threatened. But these threats no longer frighten us; when we are offered a dogma we ask for a proof, and when we do not get it, we draw our own conclusion. When, *e.g.*, a writer like Father Tyrrell tells us that Jesus taught that man, till baptism, was possessed by Satan, in virtue of his natural birth, we admit that it sounds very dreadful, but ask where Jesus *did* teach anything of the sort—and since Father Tyrrell does not condescend to tell us, we simply pass on, and take no further notice. Earlier generations yielded more easily to theological terrorism, and when they were told that God was very angry with them for something they had not done, they did not stop to argue the point, but were exceedingly afraid. In that respect our habits have changed, and such a "fear of God" as this—the terror of children after listening to ghost-stories in the dark—is no longer for us.

And then we also feel, or at least most modern people feel, that fear is by no means a high motive. We do not think it a particular compliment nowadays to say of a teacher or anyone placed in authority that he rules his pupils or subordinates with a rod of iron; it is a poor kind of discipline that is enforced by the weapon of fear, because such discipline is sure to be broken the moment the keeper's eye is turned, or the dread of pains and penalties removed. You cannot

produce goodness by such means at all; you can impose outward conformity, but that in itself has no moral value whatever apart from an inward motive. The soul of man cannot be driven into heaven, wild-beast fashion, with iron bars made red-hot in hell-fire. So if the fear of God signified only the terror of punishment and Divine vengeance, such a motive might restrain a man from this and that form of wickedness, but you would not call that even the beginning of wisdom.

But there is a true fear of God, which is quite a different emotion. It is whole worlds removed from the mere unwilling obedience rendered under compulsion to a stronger force, which can inflict awkward consequences upon disobedience. I would rather name it a holy awe, a feeling akin to what perhaps you have experienced in some mountain solitude, or when looking out on a majestic sea, or in the contemplation of a gorgeous starry sky: a feeling that all this wondrous universe sways to one transcendent Will, is the manifestation of infinite Purpose, thrills responsive to one Divine law, and that in all this scene of ordered splendour we, too, have our place—we, too, form part of that great design, with this difference, which exalts us above stars and suns, that it lies with us to fill our part well and creditably if we will. We are called to be fellow-workers with God, but not as bond-slaves. You see that such a consciousness has nothing in common with terror or cowardice: it is, on the contrary, fraught with a new sense of confidence, if also necessarily a new sense of responsibility. This fear of God, or awe of God, gives meaning and content to life; it adjusts our outlook to the truth of things; it

is the beginning of wisdom, and the condition of happiness. Let me show you, if I may, how it affects us and operates on us in relation to the world, in our relations to others, and in relation to ourselves.

And first, in relation to the world. I think that, apart from belief in God, the very vastness of the universe is enough to give one at times a feeling of frightened forlornness. It is all so inconceivably huge; its laws operate with such seeming heedlessness of us small specks of humanity, that we feel utterly negligible, as though we did not matter at all. Have you ever been alone in a large engine-room, like the Forces Motrices near Geneva, where complicated machinery was in motion? The wheels revolve, huge arms reach out this way and that, little lights appear for a moment at regular intervals, and you do not know what it all means, but the movement just continues, taking no account at all of your presence—and after a while the whole inhuman business begins to get on your nerves. It is easy to feel like that about the universe disclosed by modern science, to be simply overwhelmed by it with a sense of our own insignificance. But once the sense of God's presence in it all and over all makes itself felt, our dread gives place to confidence. We see it as a glorious scheme revealing a beneficent purpose; we see how by slow degrees God is bringing His handiwork to fruition, and the awe we experience is the awe of adoring trust. We can say with Browning's Fra Lippo:—

> This world's no blot for us
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good.

In such a world, which we feel pervaded by the Divine

Presence, we can move about freely and cheerfully, not feeling lost in its immensities, nor overlooked, but sure that we too have our appointed place to fill in it. If this is God's universe, then it is friendly to God's children ; its forces ask to be used for our benefit, its secrets wait to be discovered, its resources are ours if we will set ourselves to develop them ; yes, its very difficulties are intended to test and brace us, to challenge us and make us stronger. And you know that that is the true attitude towards the world—to regard it as the scene of Divine opportunity, of Divine discipline —and the man or woman who does so regard it, so uses as not abusing it, is the one who will achieve the truest success and know the highest joy. No atheistic or materialistic view of the world can give us that assurance, can supply that dynamic ; that is why the sense of God's overruling Mind and Might is the beginning of wisdom.

And the same holds true in regard to our relations to each other. We begin to be wise when we realise that the moral, like the physical, universe is held together by an august and inviolable law which respects its respecters, and breaks its breakers. It is of God's ordinance, not of man's contrivance—that is why it cannot be set aside. And we try to evade that law, and imagine we can adroitly circumvent it and escape its action, just for one reason, or from one delusion, viz., because we do not recognise its Divine origin and authority. Do not misunderstand me. Of course we are not to think of God as a heavenly dominie with uplifted ferule waiting to bring down punishing strokes upon offenders ; nevertheless He is to be held in awe

and reverence as a just and righteous Ruler, whose decrees are not to be mocked or lightly regarded. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" When men ruthlessly exploit their fellow-creatures, grind the faces of the poor, make their dirty dividends out of sweated labour, coin the misery of the economically helpless into gold, shall we not say in plain terms that what is lacking in their hearts is the fear of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? When civilised nations aid and abet each other in nefarious plans for filching from another, weaker, less civilised people its land and liberty, or when they cultivate distrust and ill-will against each other until the dreadful arbitrament of war seems the only way to cut the Gordian knot skilfully made by diplomacy, has not the fear of God's statutes vanished from their darkened minds? To have that fear is the beginning of a true estimate of life; it is to begin to see light in God's light shining through the tangled undergrowth of passion, greed, selfseeking; it is to rise above the ethics of the jungle, which still rule over large tracts of business, while they are supreme in international relationships, where we seem to have hardly emerged from the savage state as yet. But God's law is not merely to be feared; when we recognise its beneficent nature and intent, when we perceive that in fulfilling it we fulfil our own highest possibilities, then we arrive at the stage when we render it our unforced homage, our free and glad obedience, and know it for the law of liberty, the law of Christ, the law of love. "A new commandment give I unto you—that ye love one another."

I need say very little, in conclusion, about this fear of God as it operates in relation to the individual soul. To know at each moment that we hold whatever powers we possess under God and from Him; that we are responsible to Him for the use we make of our faculties; that we stand in a direct, close and intimate relation to One who knows us altogether—that is at once a sobering and an uplifting consciousness; it is in this that men and women have found the strength to overcome the world, to despise its paltry bribes, to withstand its angry threats, to keep their hands clean and their hearts unenslaved, and to tread sin underfoot. Once a soul truly fears God he is liberated from every other fear. In this same consciousness, too, our sorrows may be bravely and patiently borne, instead of crushing us, because they are not inflicted by a blind and callous fate, but are a fast of the Lord's appointing, and part of the counsel of Him in whose loving wisdom it is our own highest wisdom to confide. We do not fear Him as a tyrant, but reverence Him as a parent, whose whole intent towards us is good and gracious; and in His strong hand, though many a hope may fail, and many a star grow dim in the heavens, and the solid ground rock beneath our feet, we are safe. In this world, and in all worlds, we are safe. In a multitude or alone, we are safe. For to fear Him is to trust Him, and to commit our spirits to Him—all whose tenderness we have seen shining in the face of Jesus Christ—for time and eternity. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," says the Old Dispensation; "but," adds and completes the New, "perfect love casteth out fear."

II

THE DUTY OF INDUSTRY

"He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich."—PROV. x. 4.

WE called the Book of Proverbs last Sunday morning a book of every-day religious counsel for every-day folk, a book which has much to say about wisdom, but means by wisdom the art and science of right living. It lacks all romantic touch, it is free from any suspicion of mysticism; in reading its chapters we are caught up into no third heaven—we are, on the contrary, kept uncommonly close to the realities, the tasks and duties and responsibilities of life. It has thus, like the Epistle of James, a special and most useful function to perform.

Many people go to religion, when they do so at all, with a view to escaping from these pressing realities—they like a romantic, or sentimental, or soothing religion, something which shall act as a pleasant opiate, ministering a grateful temporary oblivion of week-day cares and preoccupations. Well, of course, we do not get that in Proverbs; the authors of these shrewd maxims, drawn from close observation and experience, are not concerned with ingenious speculations or soulful yearnings, but with the problem of how men may make the most and the best of life—*this* life. They do not, for instance, profess to sing the praises of poverty, or to

undervalue security from harassing economic care; their advice is addressed to those who would become orderly, well-reputed, not unprosperous members of the community, leading useful lives, keeping their passions under control, enjoying the affection of their family, the esteem of their acquaintances, and leaving an unspotted name behind them. A very prosaic ideal, in short; and yet, let us be quite honest, the ideal most of us would be abundantly satisfied to realise, the ideal which would give us a happy and healthy race of people if it were steadily aimed at.

Suffer me to say another thing before I come to our immediate subject this morning. The morality inculcated in this book is by no means based on mere selfish calculations; behind the faithfulness in the discharge of our daily obligations there lies all the time a working faith in God who has ordained our lot in His wisdom and righteousness. We are to be obedient, not to a soulless law, which will crush us if we are so foolish as to come into collision with it, but to a beneficent Lawgiver, whose discipline is a parent's discipline, designed to help us and promote our own highest interests. And I ask, is it not good for us so to carry religion into our daily life, to feel that he who exercises the humblest virtues in relation to his fellows, as employee or as employer, as a buyer or a seller, is really serving God—is, indeed, rendering the particular service without which mere emotion, however sincere, is singularly unavailing? People are always trying to escape from that interpretation of religion, on the pretence that it is too low; as a matter of fact I suspect that they find it too hard. I have positively seen it stated in a modern work that "it is only the sacraments that

make us sons of God—morality can never do so ;" and that a fairly faulty life, with frequent sacraments, is more pleasing to God than a life of heroic virtue without sacraments ! Now I regard this kind of teaching as simply pernicious ; and instead of this morbid, incense-laden atmosphere we had better breathe the clean, wholesome air of morality based on religion which meets us in the Book of Proverbs.

The passages we read this morning inculcate in the plainest terms the duty of industry, indicating its rewards, and warning against the vice of indolence. That is not merely Old Testament teaching ; it meets us again in Jesus' Parable of the Talents, with its praise of the good and faithful servant and its vivid condemnation of the wicked and slothful one. Jesus had grown up in an atmosphere which appreciated good and honest work, and set a very high value indeed upon manual exertion. The greatest Jewish rabbis all had a trade at their fingers' ends, and maintained themselves by their labour, as carpet-weavers, needle-makers and the like; and no one looked down on them, but rather esteemed them more highly on that account. Paul wrought with his hands as a weaver of tent-cloth, and as the shuttle flew to and fro, the busy shuttle of his mind was at work likewise, and he wove the strange and intricate patterns of his doctrine. And in the seventeenth century you find the great Spinoza, a son of the same race, writing his philosophical treatises in a humble room, and earning his daily bread by polishing optical lenses. All these men were in the simplest sense of the term industrious, because they instinctively knew that self-respect and happiness lie that way ; and Jesus Himself knew the satisfaction of handling tools

in a workmanlike fashion, and finishing a job in workmanlike style.

Do not let us be afraid of coming down to very elementary things; I often wonder whether any others are worth preaching about. And the first thing to recognise and proclaim aloud is that the universe, as has been happily expressed, is organised on a basis of labour. Never so fully as to-day have we understood the meaning of the words, "My Father worketh hitherto—even to this day." Creation is not a finished product, but a process that is continually going on. God never rests. The elements never rest—they carry out His bidding with ceaseless perseverance. The world does not stand still. To the eye of modern science, each atom presents a scene of swiftest movement. It all does something, it all means something. Energy, action, industry, these are the mighty tune to which the whole creation moves. The hint to us is fairly obvious; indeed, it defies misunderstanding, and we disregard it at our dire peril and severe practical inconvenience. "My Father worketh hitherto, *and I work*," we read in John's Gospel; the words are attributed to Christ as the ideal Representative of all humanity. We are not asked, broadly speaking, if we will work—if such an arrangement commends itself to us; we have got to. The very savage has to hunt in order to live. The world offers us all the raw materials for our maintenance, but they are in such a state that we have to turn to before we can use or enjoy them. Every article we touch, everything that ministers to our necessities, is the product of labour; and if we were all millionaires, it would not make the slightest difference, or do away with the need for a single hand's-turn to

keep the world going. The biggest banking account would not keep a room dusted, or mend a pair of shoes, or bake a loaf of bread, or wash a pair of curtains, or carry provisions across the sea, or drive a nail, or lay a brick. And we are on a system of short supplies all the time. Consumption and production only just keep pace with each other. Let there be a really general strike in any one industry, such as we have recently experienced, and calamity stares us in the face.

Why do I remind you of these obvious things? Because I want to bring it home, especially to the younger folk, that there is no meaner ambition in the world than to escape this general ordinance. *Some*one has got to keep the world—to keep the myriad homes in every country—going concerns; if not we, still someone, by toil and patience and quiet performance of a hundred indispensable tasks. Think of a vessel that has sprung a leak, and the water can only just be kept under by everyone obeying the order, "All hands to the pumps"; would it be a very glorious thing for any able-bodied person to loll in his state-room, relying on the exertions of the rest? The image is not so far-fetched, for we are, as I said, continually on short supplies; and if it takes all sorts to make a world, it takes the contributions of all sorts, bodily and mental, to sustain the world, and satisfy the world's needs of body and mind. We all live on work—either our own or other people's—with every breath we draw; and to dream of being a mere parasite is a sheer self-degradation.

To be among the world's workers is a necessity for most; it should be a point of honour with all who are

not disabled, for the duty of industry is simply imperative, while its fulfilment opens the road to self-respect for the humblest toiler. Let us get rid of the last trace of snobbishness in this respect—and in every other. Since all industry is indispensable, all is honourable. "A brave employment indeed for the son of a duke," sneered the French nobleman at his brother, who had turned monk, and acted as servitor, "to be washing up greasy dishes!" "A brave employment truly," was the quiet answer, "to labour in the service of Jesus Christ." For whatsoever craft or trade or profession we follow, it may all be exercised to the glory of God.

And may I say this—that while the ordinary work the world requires calls for all the industry and fidelity we are capable of, the great achievements of the world have one and all been the outcome of truly terrible toil. Edison, who speaks with authority on the subject, has given it as his view that genius is two per cent. inspiration and ninety-eight per cent. perspiration. We read that "when he was inventing his storage battery, he was at work in his laboratory every morning at 7.30. His luncheon was sent to him in the shop, and although he sometimes went home to dinner, he was always back at eight. At 11.30 his carriage came for him, and generally had to wait three or four hours before Edison could go home. He kept this up for over a year; hundreds of experiments were made, innumerable models were built and discarded, and still the struggle went on steadily and persistently, until repeated failure ended in triumphant success." And of a worker in quite another field, Robert Louis Stevenson, we know with what immense and determined effort he

mastered the business of writing, what a long and laborious apprenticeship he served. And if he became a master, the mastery never grew easy. "He re-wrote some passages of his work four times over; he burned the entire first draft of 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,' lest it should tempt him, when a criticism by his wife had revealed a fundamental flaw in it." Now that was neither more nor less than heroism. When he had already become famous wherever the English tongue was read, he confessed that there were times when he broke down at every paragraph, and had to "wring one sentence out after another." Every conscientious writer knows that feeling, and the desperateness of it—the temptation to let the second-best stand, rather than strive after an impossible best. I have known a man re-write and re-write pages, all for the sake of apparently quite trifling improvements; and that not for the sake of "style" as such, but from a resolute and scrupulous love of truth.

But to turn to Stevenson's sheer indomitable industry again; listen to this record: "When a temporary illness lays him on his back, he writes in bed one of his most careful and thoughtful papers. When ophthalmia confines him to a darkened room, he writes by the diminished light. When, after hæmorrhage, his right hand has to be held in a sling, he writes some of the poems in his 'Child's Garden of Verses' with his left hand. When the hæmorrhage has been so bad that he dare not speak, he dictates a novel in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet." "I frankly believe," he once said, "thanks to my dire industry, I have done more with smaller gifts than any man of letters in the world." Well, his gifts were of the highest; but they would

have availed the public nothing but for his prodigious application.

> The heights by great men won and kept
> Were not attained by sudden flight;
> But they, while their companions slept,
> Were toiling upward through the night.

Well might this man, whose life-long battle against odds is an inspiration and a tonic, say, "Acts may be forgiven, but not even God Himself can forgive the hanger-back."

Well then, this is the point I want to drive home—that since the world has a right to our best, and since the best means the full employment of our powers, there is no excuse for the shirker, the person who tries to manage on a minimum of effort. And incidentally let me say that the stars in their courses fight against the man whose chief aim is to find out how little he need do without, say, endangering his position; some day he is sure to do just a shade too little, and then he will be surprised and saddened by the consequences. For this is one of the things that tell their own tale—the difference between this man, who is wondering how little effort he *need* put forth, and that one, who wonders how much he *can* put forth.

But what are the rewards of all this exertion, someone asks. Well, let me be quite frank—they may, or they may not, take striking material shape, though the man who tries obviously stands a better chance to win the tangible prizes than the one who does not. But the best things are not done for money, and money cannot buy them. We all know that Milton received five pounds for the manuscript of "Paradise Lost."

Go and put an advertisement in the *Athenæum*, offering five hundred pounds for a poem of the same quality, and wait for the result. You will have to wait a long time. Do you think Florence Nightingale earned as much in a year as a successful dancer does in a week? The best work is not done for money, and the work that is done solely with a view to cash-results is never the best. The true rewards really are elsewhere, and cannot be computed in pounds, shillings, and pence. Here is the great law, that all work well done brings a satisfaction of its own to the doer. It was no less shrewd and clear-sighted a thinker than Aristotle, who, in discussing the subject of pleasure, laid it down that while not all pleasures are desirable, yet the putting forth of energy, the exercise of faculty, was always pleasurable in itself. All work reacts upon the worker, and good work makes and leaves him a better man; all we do is an expression of the soul, and in turn leaves an impression upon the soul—our deed is never done with us when we are done with it. Just because, as I said, activity is the tune to which the whole creation moves, we feel at our best when we are actively employed, when our energies find full scope, and some work is growing under our hand. Of Huxley we are told that when he was in the meridian of his great gifts, and in the full career of joyful work, he used to say that at the end of every day he felt a strong desire to say "Thank you" to some Power, if he could only have known to whom to say it. I am sure to many a man or woman of immeasurably lesser gifts than Huxley the same experience has come again and again, the experience of thankfulness for the opportunity and the ability to work—

though they do know what Huxley did not, viz., to whom to say "Thank you."

And do you not think this delight in doing, which is the reward of industry, links us on, proves us to be akin, to Him who is Himself the Fount of all energy, that God who is described, and rightly described, as rejoicing in His work? He might have placed us in a perfect, finished world, an environment that left us with nothing to do but sit and admire and enjoy it all; but God, in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, provided some better thing concerning us. He provided us with a world so constituted that apart from us it should not be made perfect, a world that called aloud for improvement, and challenged us to use our faculties for improving it. In the course of a public debate on "Theism or Atheism?" Mr. Foote, the Editor of the *Freethinker*, once asked whether we were not always reminding God of what He had left undone. It was an odd question, coming from an atheist, who does not believe in God at all; but in any case, is it not obvious that, like a wise parent, God has purposely left us something to do, in order to train our faculties, and that He is graciously pleased to accept our co-operation? The normal, the rightly-constituted child wants something to do, not to have everything done for him; his growing powers crave an outlet, and he is miserable if such an outlet is not provided for him. Either that, or, still more likely, he will, merely in order to do *some*thing, do something undesirable.

And we are children of a larger growth, no more; and the best feature of the world, for us, is that it invites and indeed compels us to prove our mettle, and toughen our fibre, and pit our brain against its difficul-

ties, and wrest from it its secrets and its treasures, and turn its barren wildernesses into smiling fields and leafy gardens. And when we with full purpose of heart set ourselves to our task—it may be the highest or the lowliest: "all service ranks the same with God"—we discover that hidden forces work along with us, aid us, supply a measure of strength greater than we thought ourselves in possession of, give us fresh and unexpected resources. It may be, as I said, the highest or the lowliest task—what matters is our way of setting about it: whether it is brain-work or hand-work, or a combination of the two is immaterial. Goethe, with his prodigious output, tells us of this experience—how at times, in producing, labour seemed strangely lightened by a very inrush of ideas, coming like a gift unsought. Yes; but it is not only ideas that come in this fashion; it is fortitude, a sudden replenishing of the physical power of endurance, in the case of some poor mother watching by the bedside of her child, and fighting for its life; it is the tired worker, telling himself that this task shall and must be done ere he rises, who feels his pulses throbbing with new energy, exactly as if, his own capital exhausted, a loan had been granted him with which to complete his enterprise—nay, rather, as though a free grant has been made to him, he knows not whence. Or else, maybe, he does know: he knows that he is in tune with the mighty force that sweeps the world onward, and that just because he is co-operating with God, God in turn co-operates with him, filling his emptiness out of His infinite fulness.

There lies the secret of power, there the sacredness of industry, in that it raises us to the rank of conscious

helpers of the Most High God, whether we labour at household tasks, or in business, or in whatever useful profession or avocation. In realising that we are set here to help on His purposes, and that we do so by every faithful stroke of work, lies the realisation of our own dignity. We are children of His household, and in that great family each one is meant by his or her personal exertions to contribute to the comfort, the happiness of all, the smooth working and efficiency of the whole. When we all come to see in our faculties, in our implements, in our varied spheres of labour, the opportunities of serving God by serving the world, the kingdom of heaven will be in the midst of us.

I have spoken of Stevenson in connection with our subject, as one can hardly help doing when the subject is that of any manly virtue; let me close by quoting a poem and a prayer of his, which will tell you more of the truth of the matter than many sermons.

O to be up and doing, O
Unfearing and unshamed to go
In all the uproar and the press
About my human business!
For still the Lord is Lord of might;
In deeds, in deeds He takes delight;
The plough, the spear, the laden barks,
The field, the founded city, marks;
Those He approves that ply the trade,
That rock the child, that wed the maid,
That with weak virtue, weaker hands,
Sow gladness on the peopled lands,
And still with laughter, song and shout
Spin the great wheel of earth about.

And this is the prayer he prayed, and in which we

may all join : " Give us to go blithely on our business. Help us to play the man ; help us to perform the petty round of irritating concerns and duties with laughter and kind faces ; let cheerfulness abound with industry."

III

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."—PROV. xviii. 21.

A WEEK ago, you may remember, I happened in passing to draw a comparison between the Book of Proverbs and a New Testament writing which is permeated by a very similar spirit, namely the Epistle of James. Both these books are very much concerned with the problems and the ethics of every day, with the commonplace duties, trials and pursuits that make up so much of the warp and woof of life; both preach a religion of right conduct, and trouble themselves very little with the niceties of theological speculation, but are taken up with the "here-and-now" side of things almost to the exclusion of any other.

Of course, such writers do not show us the whole of religion; you may even say that they ignore some of its vital aspects; but by pegging away at "this one thing" they perform a useful and much-needed service. You may remember the famous sarcasm in which Gibbon the historian indulged concerning the everlasting disputes which rent the Christian Church during the early centuries, disputes on such points as whether the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father only or from the Son as well—just as though anybody could have known; well, Gibbon says that these zealous defenders of their various -isms were so busy

wrangling over these abstract questions that they really had no time left for practising the precepts of their Founder. Books like Proverbs and James act as wholesome correctives to this tendency to forsake or neglect the weightier matters of the law for the tithing of mint, anise and cummin—they bring us back sharply and with relentless insistence to "the agenda of the faith"; and since these writers share the same outlook, the same fundamental attitude, it is not to be wondered at that they deal very largely with the same topics, and in a very similar temper.

This remark applies particularly to the subject we have before us this morning; both in the Book of Proverbs and in the Epistle of James we find a very clear sense of the enormous power wielded by speech, its tremendous possibilities both for good and evil. Take, from the Hebrew writing, such contrasted utterances as these: "A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth; and a word in season, how good it is!" Then, on the other hand, this rather scornful estimate: "In all *labour* there is profit; but the *talk* of the lips tendeth only to penury." Again, "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad." True, but set over against this comes such a strongly-worded reflection as the following: "With his mouth the godless man destroyeth his neighbour," and once more, "An evil-doer giveth heed to wicked lips; and a liar giveth ear to a mischievous tongue"—words which, by the way, express the truth, worth remembering and underlining, that to listen to base tittle-tattle shows as vicious a taste as that of the purveyor and retailer of that kind of garbage himself or herself. After all, let us be candid, there would be no

tale-tellers—their occupation would be gone—if it were not for greedy appetites welcoming their spicy dishes. Now all we read on this subject in Proverbs is very much in the same strain as the reflections of James on the little member which boasteth such great things, and is so powerful for good and for ill: "Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire; and the tongue is a fire . . . Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made in the likeness of God; out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing."

Well now, taking the widest view of the subject, there can be no doubt that speech is by far the most wonderful instrument with which Providence has endowed us. I believe Max Müller was right when he said, "No thought without language; no language without thought." Of course, in a rudimentary form, this endowment is shared by many animals; birds, we are told, have one particular call which covers all kinds of food, and another which warns against every sort of danger. And I think everyone who has had much to do with an intelligent dog feels at times that the animal is conscious of his limited powers of expression, is fretting against those limitations, and would like to say ever so much more than he is able, so keen are his emotions of pleasure, anticipation, disappointment, indignation, sorrow. Then, when we come to the human being, how wonderful to trace a child's gradual acquisition of word after word, his attempts to build up sentences—how much more wonderful to reflect that all the time he is simultaneously building up his whole universe! And then again, what a difference between, say, a rural labourer who is supposed to

manage with a vocabulary of five hundred words, and some highly-cultivated intelligence which needs and uses, perhaps, ten thousand or more for the purpose of self-expression !

The most marvellous of tools, and the most powerful, is speech ; certainly, if we will think it over, the one by which we are, every one of us, made and moulded more than by any other agency. It is by what we hear all day and every day—in the circle of our homes, in the houses of our friends, from the sharers of our daily labours in the office, the school, the warehouse, the shop, the factory—that we are shaped and fashioned, subtly and imperceptibly perhaps, but none the less surely. Carlyle, of whom it is said that he commended the value of silence, but did so in thirty volumes—Carlyle was also eloquent in discerning the influence of what he called the speaking-man ; and certainly in all generations God has entrusted His messages to the lips of His appointed agents, to make known His decrees among men. Who can measure what has been accomplished in the world's history by the power of speech ? Is not the ability to speak clearly, movingly, convincingly, one of the indispensables for all leadership ? What has tyranny always dreaded and tried to suppress but the power of the word ? What is it that the slave-holding South sought with all its might to fetter and gag but the propaganda of the word? There is no weapon comparable to the weapon of great oratory in immediate effectiveness. What was it made Herod shiver on his throne ? Just the uncompromising language of a rugged, plain-spoken, religious demagogue called John ! I remember once, at a ministerial gathering, the amazing statement being made

that "apart from the miracles Jesus would have been nothing but a mere talker." One could only gasp one's surprise. What—the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Prodigal, the denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, mere talk? But these were deeds, they were battles, they made history. And so it has been from that day to this; the people who have moved the world, in political emancipation, in the path of social reform, in the deepening of the spiritual life, have always been those who had the power of translating thought into speech, they were "lords of language," who played upon their audiences as on instruments.

But now let me point out another thing, fully as important, and of even greater practical significance for us all. It is a fact that (apart from the words of a few supreme master-minds) the public utterance from platform or pulpit, however eagerly listened to, exercises far less formative influence than the daily, informal conversation we carry on amongst ourselves. The preacher's opportunity comes once a week, and he delivers his mind in a couple of sermons which, taken together, occupy perhaps a little over an hour. Well, though he speak with the tongue of men and of angels, his is just one note falling upon the ears of his listeners, however resonant he may try to make it—just one note in a whole orchestra which may possibly be playing quite a different tune, or maybe half-a-dozen different airs. We will assume, for argument's sake, that he really has a message to deliver, that he has had his intermittent glimpse of heavenly things and high ideals, and does his poor best to interpret the ones and commend the others to his hearers on Sunday: if their own habitual thought runs on quite other lines, if their

general talk is on another level altogether, if their conversation is exclusively occupied with topics of an entirely worldly character, then the preacher, for all his endeavour, sincere though it be, is in effect only a sounding brass, a voice whose utterances are swiftly forgotten, carried away and washed out of remembrance by a flood of commonplace talk dealing with anything and everything under the sun, but not with the things of God and His righteousness.

And so what I would impress upon you is this—the enormous and incessant influence we exercise on each other simply in and by our talk—our every-day talk, which allows the soul to appear in undress. What we say in our privacy to one another is not only much more characteristic than the views we may express in the presence of an audience, but in the aggregate these unstudied remarks exercise a far greater influence than what is said from platform or pulpit. The seventeenth and eighteenth century spoke of a man's character as his "walk and conversation," and I think that hit the nail on the head; conversation, the give-and-take of social intercourse, is the true index of character—and here comes in the responsibility we all incur for the use we make of that wonderful instrument of speech. Think how lives are made and marred by words; how a rough jest will for ever destroy some childlike reverence; how a hinted evil will taint and corrupt an innocent mind; how a cynical profession of indifference to right and wrong will remain as a memory in the listener, and perhaps at the critical moment sway the balance; how unkind speech, or frivolous speech, or cheap sneers and scoffs at high and holy things rub the bloom off the young soul, so that things are never

the same again—think of this, and you will sympathise with the seeming harshness of our Lord's declaration, "I say unto you, that every idle word that men speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

But there is one responsibility, or rather one abuse of speech, on which, as we have already seen, the Book of Proverbs has much to say, and says it very emphatically—the vice of scandal. "For lack of wood the fire goeth out," says the graphic old writer, "and where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth." There is no social offence more cowardly and injurious than this; it is perpetrated in secrecy, under the seal of privacy—it nearly always wears the mask of superior righteousness appalled by other folk's misdemeanours, and I believe the mask sometimes deceives the very wearers; you can seldom cope with the pest, for the distributors of evil gossip will not, if they can help it, come into the open to make good their statements or stand the consequences. Pascal probably exaggerated—at least let us hope so—when he remarked that "if people knew what was said about them, there would not be four friends in the world"; but one may sympathise with Sir Peter Teazle's frame of mind when, after exclaiming against "these utterers of forged tales, coiners of scandal, and clippers of reputations," he meekly consented to call at Lady Sneerwell's, "just to look after his own character."

It is easy enough to smile at the propensity to gossip which—let me say it at once and with the utmost clearness—is no more the peculiar monopoly of one sex than of the other; but the truth is that this habit does

perhaps more to break hearts and ravage happiness than many vices we are far more severe in condemning. You find by little signs which at first you disregard—then, as they accumulate, can no longer ignore—that some subtle change is coming over your world; that you meet with coldness in the place of cordiality, that there is an invisible barrier, a sense of constraint, yes, here and there what can hardly be anything but intentional avoidance; and you wonder and puzzle what it can be, and are torturing yourself with surmises, until, perhaps by mere chance, or by the good sense of some friend, you are placed in possession of the truth: some silly, baseless slander, assiduously repeated, has been going the rounds concerning you, and you will be more than usually fortunate if you ever bring it home to the original disseminator; even if you do so, the lie or half-truth has got so long a start that you will be hard put to it to overtake its galloping steeds. The mischief will have been done before you can track it to its source, and the undoing will prove weary and disheartening work.

I have a recollection that it was, of all people in the world, the gentle spirit of Edna Lyall that was once roused to write a little book called "The Autobiography of a Slander"; but a living novelist wielding a more mordant pen than Edna Lyall has given us a pen-picture of such a trafficker in offal which no one who has read it is likely to forget—the flushed face, the gleam of malice in the eyes, the eager whispers of highly-seasoned "bits," the pledges of confidence exacted in the sure and certain knowledge that they would be broken, and that the scandal would travel, spread and infect the very atmosphere. And what

kind of experience must it have been that made a great living poet, Mr. William Watson, lash out in those terrible lines :—

> She is not old, she is not young,
> The Woman with the Serpent's Tongue,
> The haggard cheek, the hungering eye,
> The poisoned words that wildly fly . . .
> Burnt up within by that strange soul
> She cannot slake, or yet control ;
> Malignant-lipped, unkind, unsweet,
> Past all example indiscreet ;
> Hectic, and always overstrung—
> The Woman with the Serpent's Tongue.

There are two things one wants to say before passing on ; one, that while in almost every other respect one is in favour of a gentler way with wrong-doers, one could wish that the punishments meted out to slanderers could be rendered more severe, so as to inspire anyone similarly disposed with a wholesome terror of the consequences attending such nefarious practices ; the other, that a community or society in which scandal and tale-bearing are rife, has the answer of death within itself, is suffering from a moral leprosy, is a danger to decent folk.

But let us ask ourselves, as we always must when dealing with a disease, what are its causes ?—for only so can we possibly discover the remedy. There is, of course, in some twisted, perverted natures, a sheer love of mischief for its own sake, a desire to inflict pain and make others suffer ; the genius of Shakespeare has drawn that type of human devil for us in Iago—"honest Iago," as his deluded victim calls him ; but that is happily an exceptional type, and I would

again remind you that even such a one would be largely powerless for evil were it not that there are so many ready to form an audience and join in the chorus when someone's character is being attacked and defamed. The very Park orator must succeed in gathering his audience before he can preach his particular gospel. More frequently, I think, scandal springs from envy, from disappointment, from that ignoble ailment of ignoble natures, jealousy. To dim, by a little skilful insinuation, the brightness to which they themselves could not attain; to suggest a base admixture in some fine character, or a base motive for some noble deed; or to hint at tales that might be told concerning the man or woman who stands high in public esteem—that is the kind of revenge which is sweet to unsuccessful mediocrity or thwarted ambition. "Yes, he's got to the top all right; would you like me to tell you how he got there?" "A great artist, is she? I daresay; it takes the gilt off, though, when you know"—so-and-so. And sometimes, alas—"Yes, he's quite a leader in the denomination now; well, if you'd known him as I did when we were fellow-students . . ." Oh, hideous, hideous, isn't it? Hellish, that's the word. "But the Pharisees said, 'By the prince of the devils casteth He out devils.'" Let us watch and pray lest we enter into such temptation; and let us habitually ask ourselves, when we hear some story to the discredit of the eminent and successful, how much of it may have its foundation, not in fact, but in the bitterness and jealousy of exasperated failure.

But if I am to express my opinion quite frankly, I must say that in by far the greater proportion the vice of scandal is just the habit of the empty-minded, the

constitutionally dull and vapid. They have no intelligent interests, nor intelligent subjects of conversation, and they must talk about something—heaven help them!—so they talk scandal. The Spanish proverb applies to the mind: "Where there is nothing, there is the devil." It is certainly in dull societies where this poisonous plant flourishes most; I am told that small cathedral towns in the South hold the palm for malevolent gossip, and I can believe it. There is a certain measure of truth in the cynical remark that scandal is the compassionate allowance the lively make to the humdrum; and that countless stupid folk derive a sort of brightness from the real or fancied indiscretions of others. But it is an ugly and heartless business for all that, and one of the most fruitful sources of misery. How shall we stop that source—how stamp out this infection?

Well, I would in the first place direct your attention to the undertaking entered into by King Arthur's knights—"To speak no slander—no, *nor listen to it.*" We can always refuse to give ear to tales that are obviously inspired by a malevolent motive; and I submit that we are not bound to show the most scrupulous politeness to the tale-bearer who will not take a hint that you have no use for his or her wares. Plain speech in such circumstances would stop an immense deal of base calumny if it were more frequently resorted to. And in the second place, let it be realised that to show a marked fondness for gossip is to write oneself down a dullard, to proclaim oneself intellectually poverty-stricken, forced to subsist on rubbish and actually liking such diseased diet; let that impression sink in and gain ground quite steadily—let us lose

no opportunity of emphasising it—and since most people have a keen dislike of being considered mentally inferior, it will help them to restrain their proclivities towards insinuation and innuendo. A "School for Scandal" is not a gathering of agreeable rattles, but a pathetic assemblage of the feeble-minded. And thirdly —and this is most important—let us bear in remembrance that this is really a habit of empty minds, and so make it a habit to keep our own well stored. Life need not be humdrum for any of us; there are objects of interest in plenty close by—we have only to reach out. We can become enthralled in any number of topics, enter the treasure-houses of knowledge at a mere nominal entrance fee, we can throw ourselves into this or that movement where workers are wanted: in any number of ways we can so employ our energies, so store our brain-cells, that there simply will not be any room or desire left for what is, after all, very sorry trash. And if we are interested in people rather than in "subjects," there are the lives of the wise and good from which to derive profit and inspiration greater than from this or that discreditable and probably untrue piece of gossip. It is stagnant waters and stagnant minds that become putrid and breed corruption; keep the mind wholesome by keeping it alert and moving.

Let there, above all, be room, and plenty of it, for the supreme things, the supreme topics, in our thinking. To converse much with noble minds is the best cure for a taste for the common and unclean; to tarry much and lovingly in the company of Christ Jesus, to immerse ourselves in that matchless Life and Personality, is to gain a deeper and truer insight into the meaning and worth of life, to acquire a habit of refine-

ment, and to grow dissatisfied with what is merely foolish and unedifying; it is to see the greatness of existence, and to shrink from its disfiguring littlenesses and nauseating trivialities. To have the pure and true much in our thoughts will prevent the tawdry and petty from having much place in our speech. And since by our words we are to be judged, to whom shall we go for guidance and example but to Him who is the Incarnate Word, and who has the words of eternal life?

IV

THE CERTAINTY OF RECOMPENSE

"Evil pursueth sinners; but the righteous shall be recompensed with good."—PROV. xiii. 21.

IN that most wonderful of story-books which we call the Book of Genesis there is no more familiar tale than that of Jacob's dream at Bethel on his way from his father's homestead to Padan-aram. It is indeed a masterpiece of story-telling, and the picture of the exile and fugitive, his head pillowed on a stone, dreaming of the ladder which reached from earth to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending, makes an immediate and striking appeal to the imagination, as does Jacob's startled cry when he awakes, "Surely, the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!" But for the purposes of our subject this morning I have to call your attention to another feature of the narrative, which is generally overlooked, viz., Jacob's strange pact with the Almighty: "If God will be with me, and will keep me, and give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, *then* shall the Lord be my God, and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

Does not the strangeness of this vow come home to us the moment we consider it? Jacob comes fresh from a detestable fraud practised on his father and

brother—but there is nothing further from his mind than any expression of repentance or any resolution of amendment; that God should require such has not so much as dawned on him; that the Divine favour should in any way be dependent on his conduct, he has never dreamed. No; but he will make a bargain with the Most High: let God keep him, protect him, and prosper him, and he in return will give God a tenth part of his prosperity. It is purely a business transaction, into which morality does not enter in the least; a singularly unblushing business proposal, too, for Jacob is to have nine-tenths, and Jehovah a mere tenth —and that has always been the sort of bargain men have thought it perfectly fair and reasonable to strike with Heaven!

Yes, too much that calls itself religion has had for its real purpose simply the desire to conclude, as it were, favourable terms with the Deity, purchasing His protection, but purchasing it not too dearly. In all ages men have been quite willing to go through rites and ceremonies, to repeat formulas of prayer or confessions of faith, even to give up a certain proportion of their gains, so long as it was not really extravagant—ready, in other words, to do something that would cost them little or nothing, in order to make sure, as they thought, of Divine favour in this life and celestial bliss in the next. The Italian highwayman used to take his aim in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and, after plundering his victim, religiously to devote one-tenth of the spoil to the Church, thus keeping his part of the bargain, and assuring himself of a *quid pro quo* on the part of an obliging and business-like Omnipotence; and even to-day, and in countries

nearer home than Italy, there are still people who imagine that they can make up for shady business methods by a lavish support of foreign missions and religious activities generally.

Indeed, there is yet another type of religion which roundly declares that works do not matter at all, that salvation is "free," and may be laid hold of simply by an act of faith in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrificial death; of course, if we hold such a belief, the difference between right and wrong, virtue and wickedness, simply vanishes, so far as consequences are concerned, for on that supposition the worst of evil-doers is as acceptable in the sight of Heaven as the brightest saint, provided both give their assent to the doctrine of imputed guilt and righteousness, the cancelling of man's debt by Christ's sufferings or Christ's merits. Here again you have the notion of a bargain, of a transaction, in its most naked form—a fantastic bargain, true, but one in which the advantage is all on man's side.

And it is all the merest, most baseless imagination, this whole idea, with which we meet in so many and various forms, that we can gain acceptance with God either by the correctness of our creed—by faith apart from works—or by the performance of certain ceremonies, or the recital of consecrated forms of adoration. This is the most obstinate hallucination in human hearts—that it really is possible to juggle with the Divine justice, to get the better of the laws of the Eternal, that the Righteous One who reigneth over all either desires or will content Himself with anything at all except right-doing. It is the notion of God as a none too impartial judge, whose verdicts can be swayed

by flattery or bribes, who has his *protégés* and favourites who are secure from the annoyance of the law—and that notion takes a long while to dislodge from men's minds, because it is one they hug as a comfort to themselves. "He died, fortified with the sacraments of the Church," runs the Catholic phrase; "he died, believing in Christ as the only Sin-bearer and Substitute," runs the orthodox Protestant equivalent—and in both cases the meaning is that God enters His judgment according to the belief professed, and not according to the plain standards of personal merit or demerit.

From all these vain delusions—which, between them, have been responsible for immeasurable harm—we turn to the sanctified commonsense of the Book of Proverbs, which declares again and again the certainty of recompense, the prevailing power of God's holy statutes: "Evil pursueth sinners," we read, "but the righteous shall be recompensed with good." "The wicked earneth deceitful wages: but he that soweth righteousness hath a sure reward." "He that is stedfast in righteousness shall attain unto life; and he that pursueth evil doeth it to his own death." "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: how much more the wicked and the sinner." Such sayings meet us on almost every page of this ancient collection of maxims, and they might be multiplied indefinitely, showing how far the Hebrew nation had travelled in insight since the old-time legend had thought it possible for Jacob to secure the protection of Jehovah on a purely commercial basis, into which no moral considerations entered at all. The question is, *do we believe* in this rule of recompense, this unfailing process of Divine justice?

The Certainty of Recompense

The fact of the matter would seem to be that in practice every one of us more or less frequently—I will not say more or less habitually—*dis*believes in it. We think that we can evade that unfailing law, escape or circumvent its action, or that an exception will be made for our especial benefit, and are most reluctant to let that delusion go. Let me remind you of the familiar passage in the "Seven Lamps of Architecture," where Ruskin inveighs agains the idea of liberty as something impossible. "There is no such thing in the universe," he exclaims. "There can never be. The stars have it not; the earth has it not; the sea has it not; and we men have the mockery and semblance of it only for our heaviest punishment." Now it is not difficult to see that in denying liberty to man, who is a living soul, on the ground that there is no such thing in inanimate nature, Ruskin is misled by a false analogy and by a love of rhetoric; but he might have said with entire truth, "Look at the stars, the earth, the sea—all are swayed by unbreakable physical law; and do you think that it is otherwise with the ethical law, that its commandments can be disregarded with impunity, or circumvented with any hope of success?" The world is just, because it is under the governance of God; and this certainty of recompense, proclaimed with so much sober emphasis in the Book of Proverbs, is one which we may disregard if we please, but only to be taught its truth in the hard and painful school of experience. "The labour of the righteous tendeth to life; the increase of the wicked to sin." "Though hand join in hand, the evil man shall not be unpunished; but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered." Over and over again the same clear, confident note—"There shall no mischief

happen to the righteous: but the wicked shall be filled with evil."

Once more, do we believe it, or is not the statement far too absolute and unqualified? Does not every day see merit slighted, virtue unrewarded, innocence abused, patient, plodding honesty exploited, while trickery sits triumphant, crowned with success, smiled on and flattered by the world, and the wicked flourish like a green bay tree? How thoroughly naïve, we exclaim, one must be to subscribe to these copy-book maxims about no mischief happening to the righteous, while the evil shall not go unpunished—statements calculated to provoke smiles, but very bitter ones! Why, here is this man who has never been anything but an unscrupulous gambler, with an inborn hatred of work, and we all know how his lucky deals in rubber and oil have made him fabulously wealthy, so that he has all that heart can wish; while there are the multitudes of hard-working, hard-living men, glad enough to have work and health, and everlastingly afraid that one or the other will fail and they and their families be reduced to penury. No, no—the rewards are not given out with an even hand, or any pretence of fairness: the clever, unprincipled rogue has so often and so evidently the best of it, he escapes so many trials and troubles—the empty-headed seem all the lighter for climbing; as Mr. John Masefield says in his new tragic poem, and with such seeming truth—

> Heartless is ever swift at making friends,
> Heartless plucks honey from the evil time,
> The heartless soul makes many bells to chime:
> Joy-bells and death-bells, wedding-bells and dirges;
> Heartless is one of God's appointed scourges.

Nay, is it not a fact attested by the central event in history—the multitudes clamour for and obtain the release of Barabbas, while Jesus Christ is nailed to the cross? "Now Barabbas was a robber." What, in the light of all this, becomes of our facile doctrine of Divine justice and unfailing recompense?

What have we to say in answer to this plea? Only one thing—that if we will apply false standards, we shall undoubtedly arrive at false results; and the standards we have so far applied are false, the results at which we have been glancing are superficial and misleading. Jesus Christ, with His clear, penetrating vision, saw into the very heart of truth when He said, "Verily, I say unto you, that they have their reward." "Have," mark you, not "will have." In spite of appearances to the contrary, the world, being God's world, really gives us all what we pay for—just that, and only that; we get our return, as has been well said, in the same currency as we insist upon using. I grant you that the man who puts outward success above everything else stands a pretty good chance of obtaining it; for him the plaudits, for him the cheers, the limelight, the popularity, the flood of newspaper paragraphs—exactly: he has his reward, he has got the wages he has worked for, perhaps intrigued for, abased himself for—just that, and nothing else. But in his feverish pursuit of these things he has not had time to aim at other satisfactions—at an inner peace and a harmony not of the world's giving; at storing his mind with the world's best, possessions which cannot pass away and which have a wondrous power of cheering and enlivening old age. Not for him the harvest of ingathered thought, or the serenity of the lightened

soul, or the quiet joy of the religious: he has played for other stakes, has won, and in winning proved himself the loser, for these things which he has so eagerly striven for are not those that abide.

It is just the same with those who in our restless day seek above all the gratification of the senses: only let desire be keen enough, and there is every likelihood that it will not go without fulfilment; the crazy pleasure-seeker, too, will have his reward, but it is a reward which, so far from bringing him lasting joy, or sustaining the true part of him, turns to bitterness and ashes in his mouth, and leaves him, with the real prizes of life ungrasped, self-cheated out of what alone makes life worth living—worth *having been lived*, which is even more important, for it is in retrospect upon our days that our judgment grows most remorselessly—or may be remorsefully—keen.

And so it is all the way through: set your heart on power, resolve to be rich, and the chances are that you will have your reward, that your heart's desire will be granted you; but if that has been your end-all and be-all, you will inevitably have missed other things by the way, too preoccupied to stoop and pick them up. The life of culture, the life of the affections, the life of the spirit—do you say, "What's the good of all that? There's no money in it"? Very well, the world does not force these gifts on those who do not seek them, who in fact openly despise them: yet shall a time come when great possessions prove powerless to console the starved intellect, the starved heart, the starved soul, and the master of vast riches would give anything if he could occupy his mind with the tastes he has never thought it worth cultivating, or had a heart to pour his

heart's troubles into, or could enter at will into the presence of that God whom he had frankly neglected and deemed negligible in his exclusive concern with material things.

And on the other hand, when the Book of Proverbs reiterates the conviction that the righteous shall be recompensed, we may candidly admit that the writers did not mean rewards to be measured in cash or popular recognition. They, too, saw more deeply into life and human nature—they were perfectly aware that the man of high principle is no match for the rogue in the mere race for the prizes that are seen and touched; but they knew of better and more satisfying joys than these can bring—the good name, the unsullied conscience, the heart at peace with itself and God—and these are prizes which, though they are not of the world's bestowal, or perhaps because of that reason, no one ever labours for in vain. The bubble fortune won in a speculation some other speculation may burst in an instant, and disperse to the four winds of heaven; but the heavenly treasure of God's "well done" no one can deprive us of, nor, of course, need we wait for another life in order that it may be ours. Tell me, who remembers, or particularly wants to remember, the Barney Barnatos, the Alfred Beits, and the rest of the South Africa-cum-Park Lane millionaires? And who forgets, or is likely to forget, the David Livingstones, Dr. Barnardos, Father Damiens? Each of these two groups strove for one thing—and each got *that* thing; and which was more worth striving after and spending one's energies upon, no one looking on has the slightest doubt. Which of them are the failures, when we weigh up the net results of their lives? Do they not pro-

claim, in language there is no misunderstanding, " how vain unreality is, how unsubstantial is selfishness " as a basis of life ; and, " on the contrary, how enduring and gracious are truth and love " ?

But I turn to the other side of the reckoning. From very, very old times good people have been sorely perplexed, and their faith tried, by the seeming impunity of evil-doers, the strange success which attends their nefarious enterprises, the unchecked assurance with which they flaunt the laws of God. Surely, if there were a God such as we are taught to believe in, we argue, He would intervene, and vindicate His majesty by inflicting the punishment so richly deserved. That a human monster like Leopold of Belgium should live past the appointed span, meet with no hindrance in his criminal career, amass his blood-stained millions, gratify his shameful appetites, and finally die peacefully in his bed, seems to render the doctrine of Divine recompense a screaming satire upon the facts. You remember the way in which the Psalmist states the difficulty which has been felt by millions of people since his day : " I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men. Therefore His people say, how doth God know ? and is there knowledge in the Most High ? " Yes ; but then comes the extraordinary conclusion : " When I thought how I might know this, it was too painful for me, *until I went into the sanctuary of God.*" Exactly ; many things grow clear to us in the sanctuary of God that elsewhere prove an aching puzzle.

What is the solution ? This, surely, that we are

moving on altogether too low a plane when we think of punishment only as something that happens *to* a man, and is outwardly visible to others as an act of Divine judgment; both punishment and reward are, in the first place, something that happens *in* a man—happens with the same inevitableness with which all God's laws act in physical nature. It is no argument against the righteousness of God that He allows His laws to be broken; it would only be an argument if He allowed the breach to go unpunished—and that never happens. It is not a case of waiting for some future vindication of God's statutes, either here or hereafter: the effects of each deed are implicit in the deed itself—the doing makes them explicit, and that instantaneously, without any expectant interval, so surely as by pulling the trigger of a loaded rifle you speed the bullet; and this bullet has an unerring aim—the doer. We are at each instant free to do or forbear; but the instant following we have become the products of our choice, of our acts, irrevocably the better or worse. Recompense is so certain because it is immediate and automatic; instead of saying, with the Italian proverb, "God does not pay each Saturday," the truth is rather that God pays on the instant, with the most punctilious accuracy of assessing our wages. The good resolution carried out the generous impulse obeyed, the base suggestion repelled, result there and then in a better man or woman, with increase of power, the consciousness of victory, and the inner buoyancy which always follows when we have said, "I will because I ought; and I can because I will." And, on the other hand, there is the corresponding punishment, swift, just, untarrying, which follows in the wake of every ill given rein to;

the wrong-doer becomes at once a worse man, his finer instincts blunted, his vision impaired, his power of resistance to evil lessened, his spiritual vitality lowered —and whether the world sees or does not see, the fact, solemn, and even appalling, is there. And in the end the world does see, and shudders at the spectacle of decay. If you have ever read "The Picture of Dorian Gray," you are not likely to have forgotten the terrible moral of the close—how the man who had hidden the vileness of his life under a dazzling exterior, gay and exquisite, at last, in death, involuntarily yields up the secret that had been so carefully kept from the world's scrutiny: so scarred and marred by sin are his features that, when the servants found him, "it was not till they had examined the rings that they recognised who it was." I know of no sadder, truer lines than these of Mr. Watson's:

> We shape our deeds and then are shapen by them.
> To some frail heart a cruel gift we bring,
> Turn from our acts away, and think to fly them:
> Ah, theirs the stronger wing.
>
> They come upon our peace with sound of weeping,
> They find us though we hide in clefts and caves;
> They are with us waking, they are with us sleeping,
> And rend us in our graves.

But it is not upon this mournful note that we will close. Let us think rather of those, for they are an exceeding great army, who in their lives witnessed the good confession, fought the good fight, vanquished selfishness, indolence and cowardice, shrank from no sacrifices in the cause of right, in the cause of love, and have gone up on high, following in the footsteps of the Captain of their salvation, with the banner of the

Crucified waving above their host, and ask of them: "Was it worth it, the struggle, the pain, the giving-up?" With one consent they return the answer, "Yes." "Would they do it and suffer it all over again?" we continue our questioning. Once more the answer—stronger, clearer—is, "Yes." "Have they received their reward at length?" "No—not 'at length,' for there never was a moment when they had it not." And the army passes on, chanting their song of triumph:—

> "THANKS BE TO GOD,
> WHO GIVETH US THE VICTORY
> OVER SIN AND DEATH:
> THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD."

V

THE WORTH OF WEALTH

"The rich man's wealth is his strong city."—PROV. x. 15.
"He that trusteth in his riches shall fall."—PROV. xi. 28.

TO-DAY our studies in Proverbs bring us to a subject on which I venture to think that, for all our familiarity with it, there is more confusion than on most in people's mind's—confusion, and unreconciled contradiction between theory and practice—I mean the worth of wealth. That is a very bad thing, because if once we believe that our religion teaches us a view which in every-day life we are totally unable to translate into practice, religion itself will lose its reality, and become at best only a kind of Sunday profession—a very empty profession of ideals we have not the slightest intention of following out or carrying into execution. That is almost the worst thing that can happen to religion; it would be far better to disavow it altogether as impracticable—then try and frame rules which with an effort we *can* keep, and try to observe them. That we should pretend to think poverty desirable, when all the while we regard it as nothing less than our bounden duty to protect ourselves and those dependent upon us against it, only lays us open to suspicion—just as when we profess the greatest eagerness to enter a heavenly home while as a matter of fact we take every care to

prolong our sojourn on earth. Do not let us utter sentiments or pretend to cherish them merely because they are supposed to be religious; and since this question of material possessions is always with us, let us look it straight in the face, and deal candidly with it and with ourselves.

It is true, to begin with, that our Lord's first beatitude, as recorded in Luke's Gospel, reads simply, "Blessed are ye poor," while in Matthew the blessing is pronounced upon the poor *in spirit;* it is true that the former version represents probably what Jesus said, but the latter tells us what He meant. "The poor" had become in His time an almost technical term, which had reference not so much to material want or destitution as to a certain religious disposition —a disposition which was met among the toiling multitudes rather than the luxurious and pampered classes. Jesus did not mean that to live below the poverty line, unable to afford the necessaries of life, was a blessed condition; when He uttered the words which have so puzzled later generations, everybody understood their application, which was to spiritual attributes—to that receptiveness, gratitude, trustfulness which flourish in humble dwellings rather than in town mansions and country houses. Jesus was deeply and constantly aware that there were grave dangers inherent in great possessions—that gold had a tendency to dazzle men's eyes, to blind them to spiritual realities, to impair their moral vision, to act as a dead-weight preventing the spirit from rising; He knew—as who does not?—that money is liable to abuse, but He nowhere condemned ownership in itself, neither did

He extol the poverty, *e.g.*, of the prodigal in the far country—a poverty due to thriftlessness and riotous living—as a state to be desired. On the contrary, He made the prodigal acknowledge that when he was in his father's house, on the prosperous farm with its warmth and plenty, he had been in a better place.

I say all this in order to remove, if I can, certain misconceptions of Christ's teaching which weigh heaviest upon tender consciences, as though He had condemned the owning of money or of those things for which money stands. It is never a case of choosing between commonsense and the Gospel; on the contrary, the Gospel is the highest and purest commonsense. Think of the widespread calamity involved in a Liberator smash, or the stoppage of payment by the Birkbeck Bank—think what it means to realise, as scores and scores of decent, thrifty folk did, when some minor Building Society failed in South London two or three years ago, that their savings had gone irretrievably, that the provision they had made for old age had vanished, and they had to begin the world over again: who will dare to add to such disaster the mockery of calling it blessed? And in every tragedy of suicide in middle-life, is not the first question put whether the victim was financially involved or harassed? We will not pretend to despise possessions or decry money, for the very good reason that it is indispensable: indispensable for the necessities and comforts of life; indispensable for the carrying on not only of every industry and business, but for all our philanthropic and religious agencies as well. A committee is formed for the promotion of Anglo-German friendship—and

its first step is to appeal for a fund with which to pursue an effective propaganda; on the other hand, let the income of a Missionary Society be diminished, and it has to curtail its sphere of action.

Well, now, from these preliminaries we turn to the Old Testament book with which we are principally concerned in these addresses, and we find that in its pages the subject of wealth looms pretty large, as is natural and indeed inevitable in a collection of aphorisms and counsels for the guidance of life. There is no affectation of contempt for possessions in these chapters, embodying as they do the experience of a race remarkable for its keen practical intelligence. You may remember what I observed on a previous occasion: the writers of these proverbs have much to say about wisdom, but they mean no abstract philosophy, but the science and art of life. Thus, in the great eighth chapter, where Wisdom herself is speaking, bidding men to take fast hold of her, she commends herself in these terms: "Riches and honour are with me, yea, durable riches." There is no reproach in wishing, by one's own honourable exertions, to rise from the ranks of ill-paid or slenderly-paid labour, to make and keep a comfortable home for those nearest to us, to have no need for material anxieties, to have a margin for books, for music, for travel, to be able to contribute to religious causes, and help support this or that movement we have at heart. To be able to do these things is a very creditable ambition; to take that ambition away would be to cut at the very root of civilised society. So the duty of industry, on which the writers of Proverbs so strongly insist, is reinforced

by the reflection, "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." The reader is admonished to lay by for the inevitable rainy day, when some extra resources will be wanted, and be found to make all the difference, in an aphorism like the following: "The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty." And lest a man should rely overmuch on his own powers and the strength of his own exertions, and forget the Giver of all, we read: "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow therewith." Now in all this there is a perfectly undisguised appreciation of ownership and its solid satisfactions: to be out of the reach of carking care, of sordid anxieties, so that a man may have his energies free for something else than the dreary struggle to make ends meet—this is in the frankest manner held up as a consummation devoutly to be wished, and the counsel of these old-time sages is that men may take thought to attain it.

For my part, I could wish that these practical issues were realised a good deal more clearly by those who will presently, in a few years' time, find themselves with every kind of responsibility to face; if only young men at the time when they are going out into the world would keep this thought well fixed in their minds—that what they qualify themselves to be and to earn in that opening period will be one of the decisive, determining factors for the rest of their lives—a good many of the troubles and even tragedies of later life might be avoided. So long as the commodities of life are calculated in money terms—so long as money means opportunities of health, culture, educational facilities,

and the rest, that are not to be had without—it will be right and fit for men and women to seek to raise their earning capacity, to make themselves worth a decent income, which will enable them to make the most of themselves, and to do the best by those dependent on them. It is worth remembering that the gentle Charles Lamb, who was as far as anyone could be from a passion for riches, saw in money the equivalent of "health and liberty and strength," while Plato could soberly state that "the possession of wealth contributes greatly to truth and honesty." You have only to put it to yourselves negatively—the lives of men, women and children that might be saved year-in and year-out, but for the lack of means to purchase medical attendance, strengthening diet, sojourn in a sanatorium—to appreciate Lamb's point of view; it is perfectly true, and why not admit it, that there are hundreds of thousands of deserving folk in this land of ours who would say—and that in respect of a very trifling increase of income—

> Oh the little more, and how much it is,
> And the little less, and how far away!

But now, while we find in the Book of Proverbs this commonsense view of the value of possessions, the worth of wealth, quite clearly and unambiguously expressed, let me direct your attention to what, under the circumstances, is all the more remarkable—I mean, the entire frankness and insight with which the same book recognises the other side there is to all this. The same book, I say, which declares that "The rich man's wealth is his strong city," states as uncompromisingly that "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall," and that "riches profit not in the day of wrath." We read, on

the one hand, that "the crown of the wise is their riches," but on the other the warning words, "Riches are not for ever; and doth the crown endure unto all generations?" Material comforts, as we have seen, are by no means despised or undervalued by these writers—yet they also admonish us, "Weary not thyself to be rich," and "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be unpunished." So you see we have here a very balanced and sane philosophy of wealth, doubly valuable because it is free from every trace of otherworldly contempt for the things money can buy.

If only we were as keenly conscious of life's unpurchasables, of the things which money cannot buy! Think of them! This seems to me to be the most common—I had almost said the most vulgar—error people make with regard to this subject: they imagine that because money can do admittedly so much, it can do everything, and is therefore the one thing to be taken seriously; and that mistake is common both to the capitalist hasting to be rich no matter by what dubious methods, and to the labourer who really fancies that the whole problem of happiness is to be solved by wages—though I confess that, seeing how much wages mean to the labourer, and how far they have to go, my sympathies are a good deal with him. Nevertheless, the limits to what money will do or purchase are quite clearly and even rigidly drawn; and the man who makes money-getting his whole aim and purpose in life always seems to me like the owner of a fine mansion who should live in the basement all his days, leaving the noble apartments above all unused—and not even suspecting their existence.

And to begin with, to go back to a thought I ex-

pressed last week, it is quite true here as elsewhere that if you set your heart on any one particular thing —let us say, in this instance, wealth—the chances are that you will have your reward, that your heart's desire will be granted to you: but if that has been anyone's end-all and be-all, he will inevitably have missed other things by the way, too preoccupied with money-making to stoop and pick them up. Occasionally one meets a man of this type, who after thirty or forty years of this sort of existence retires from business, only to discover that he has no use for his new-found leisure, since he has no taste for anything but the one pursuit he has now given up. It is too late for him to acquire new tastes, to develop sides of himself he has studiously neglected; and being unable to derive enjoyment from literature or science or music, having never interested himself in reforms which might now absorb his energies, having insufficient culture to feel the appeal of travel, and possessing no resources in a religion he has allowed to grow unmeaning to him, he drags out his remaining years in boredom, realising too late how little money can do even to relieve his permanent *ennui*. Again, if there is one spectacle calculated to excite an equal measure of distaste and pity, it is that of the man who has made his pile, goes on adding steadily to it, and all the time has no idea how to spend what he has acquired—to whom nature and art are alike sealed books, kingdoms he cannot enter because he has not the key—the man who is a boor and a barbarian on a thousand or five thousand a year, his capacities of enjoyment quite conceivably lower than those of his pound-a-week employee. What does he get out of life, after all? He has not imagination

enough to live in the best style even on the material side: his house will still reflect in its very furnishings his crudity, the cramped condition of a mind that has never developed; all the finer pleasures of existence—which may be had on a mere fraction of his income—pass him by untasted, and when he departs this life, the real inscription on his expensive tombstone, visible to all seeing eyes, is, "Born a man, died a money-bag."

Money cannot buy the best things, but it can purchase all the worst, all that lead to the soul's undoing—there is its lure and its danger: irresponsibly used, it will minister to every one of man's lower and lowest desires, to senseless ostentation and luxury, laziness and love of ease, to the evasion of all serious responsibilities and duties, to the pursuit of every depraved appetite. Seriously speaking, few people can bear the test of great possessions, and we may congratulate ourselves that we are not among those so tested. Here is a certain volume of water, or the steam in a boiler, and by the pressure upon it power is generated: remove the pressure, and the power disappears. It is so with men: without pressure they will rarely put forth their full capacity—remove it altogether, and their life becomes self-indulgent, its fibre slackens, its edge grows dull. We see to-day perhaps a greater number of people than ever before in the world's history whose over-endowment with worldly goods is a sheer curse to them and to society at large—people who know no serious burden, who find themselves with no other task set them than to invent new and ever more costly methods of pleasuring; and if in the discharge of that task they frequently degrade and demoralise others, they themselves are surely to be pitied as well,

for while they exhaust all their ingenuity in devising fresh ways of spending what they have not toiled for, they get precious little joy—to say nothing of happiness—out of it. When we read of, and blush for, the costly stupidity of a freak-dinner costing an incredible amount per head, does anyone imagine that the host or any of his guests gets as much pleasure from such a desperate attempt to tickle their jaded palates as any working-class family sitting down to the meal the father has laboured for and the mother has prepared? The fact is that what comes to us for nothing brings us no thrill of life, and it is not surprising that those seeming favourites of fortune who evade the law which commands us to earn the right to live by service and sacrifice, should not find life particularly worth living.

And the things which people barter in exchange for money—what bad bargains they make! The coarsened dispositions, the stains upon their consciences, the sense of mean actions meanly done, great opportunities unworthily slighted, ignoble compromises readily entered into—what a depressing tale it makes, and would we in cold blood be prepared to pay the same price? If you have read that wise and witty book, "The Comments of Bagshot," you will remember how this very topic crops up, and how Bagshot triumphantly demonstrates that quite average persons will not buy prosperity at the cost of self-respect. How would it be, he asks, if things were so arranged that the heir to a property had also to take over the character, disposition and appearance of the testator? Pardon a longish quotation:—

"Supposing X.," he said, naming a notorious millionaire,

" left you the whole of his millions on condition that you took his cruel chin and snub nose and rascally disposition, would you accept them ? " The answer was a more emphatic than polite negative. " Which means," pursued Bagshot quietly, " that you would not for all his money change places with him. But let us take a less acute case not involving present company. Would my charming niece, Molly, who is sadly impecunious, and greatly desires to marry a most deserving but wholly unendowed young officer, take her Aunt Sarah's thousand a year if she had also to assume her honoured countenance and evangelical disposition ? " . . . Swiftly we judged, and declared that Molly would go penniless all her days, scrub floors, sweep crossings, and die at the last in a workhouse rather than take up that forbidding heritage. Bagshot pursued the theme with a wealth of illustration. Was there any painter, poet, musician worth his salt who would exchange his talents for the endowed Philistinism of Mr. T. ? (The initial concealed an extremely undesirable personality.) The offer would scarcely tempt even a starving journalist.

And so, in short, they came to the unanimous conclusion that almost everybody is quite convinced that no money can possibly compensate for the loss of beauty, health, happiness, good temper, and that all that really mattered in life was inaccessible to the money motive.

Wealth, we agreed, can command all the worst things, but hardly any of the best. It has blemished and tarnished many a name—it is quite powerless to cleanse one that is blemished ; it has inflamed and incited men's hearts to the lowest deeds—it has never inspired an act of heroism, of self-sacrifice, of generous passion, for acts so inspired would at once lose their heroic, or generous, or unselfish quality. It can instigate treason—it cannot encourage loyalty, for a loyalty needing such encouragement would not be worthy the

name. All the money in the world will not purchase a heart at peace with itself and God; all the money in the Bank of England would fail to create a fine thought, or to kindle a high ambition, or to add to the world's treasures of immortal song, or music, or painting. Great pictures fetch "fancy prices," for the simple reason that there is literally no cash standard to determine their value. A thinker of world-wide reputation like Professor Eucken, of Jena, after a lifetime's strenuous devotion to the deepest problems, is awarded the Nobel prize, and we are delighted; but would the chance of winning that very handsome award—a fortune of some £8,000—have produced Eucken's works?

No, no; the world's finest achievements owe their existence to some other stimulus, they have not been executed for material emoluments, but in response to some other and more heavenly call, which they who heard it dared not disobey. And the greatest motive power of all—religion, and especially the religion of the Cross—could never have originated in a money atmosphere, has won its victories through the instrumentality of those whose eyes were fixed upon some brighter radiance than that of gold, and has ever found its staunchest votaries among men and women who found the true values of life elsewhere than in its cash values. Let us neither despise nor over-estimate possessions, seek them as a means, but not as an end of living, administer them as a trust from God, shun the dangers with which too frequently they are fraught, and pray for the advent of that better time when neither want nor waste will be known, but humanity itself be the great ossessor of all the earth's resources. In the mean-

time, what wiser petition than that of the old writer in the Book of Proverbs: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me: lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" To which we may link on the Saviour's words, who admonished us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, to cultivate a filial spirit, gentle hearts, trustfulness, obedience, love—possessions incorruptible; for where our treasure is, there will our hearts, there will our home, be also.

VI

THE MEDICINE OF MIRTH

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones."—PROV. xvii. 22.

IN thinking of the subject on which I am to speak to you this morning, a reminiscence came suddenly into my mind, which perhaps will form the best introduction. All the day long our mule-drawn carriage had been taking us uphill, from a little above the level of the Lake of Geneva, until the grey Hospice of the St. Bernard came into sight. We had started on a hot August morning, and the temperature had grown oppressive; then, suddenly, a perceptible drop—a keen and searching air—announced that we had crossed the snow-line. Scantier and scantier became the vegetation until it disappeared altogether, colder and colder the air, and at last we moved in mid-August among the eternal snow and ice, so that we were very glad to reach our destination. What a life the monks on the St. Bernard live, with ten months' unbroken winter, exposed to appalling rigors of climate, while even in their wintry summer the surface of the little lake near the monastery was frozen; a life full of privations, hardship, unremitting duties, which none can endure for more than nine or ten years, after which

those who survive are dismissed to a gentler sphere of service, but generally in impaired health.

Yet, as we crossed the gate, and proceeded along the grim corridor, a most unexpected sound met our ears; from the piano in the Common Room (a gift, by the way, of King Edward's), there came a sparkling melody, merry and vivacious, the lightest and cheeriest of music. For a moment it seemed oddly out of place in those solemn surroundings; but then, as one reflected, one felt that, on the contrary, it was just here that such an antidote to gloom and depression was wanted, and one blessed the kindly thought of the English monarch who had commemorated his visit as Prince of Wales by bestowing such a boon where it would bring so much joy. Many were the lively tunes played that evening, and I suppose on many evenings, on the heights of the St. Bernard; and we visitors had the opportunity of testing, in our intercourse with the monks, the wisdom of the old writers in the Book of Proverbs, who declared that "a merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance," and "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

That is a good doctrine, essentially a sound doctrine, and one is glad to find it among the maxims of this old-world collection. Here is a book which, on the one hand, is distinctly religious, and on the other hand distinctly practical, a book which deals with the conduct of life in almost every aspect; it has plenty to say on the serious business of living, its duties, difficulties, trials and disappointments—but in the midst of other and more strenuous topics mirth is happily not forgotten, indeed, it is commended in very whole-hearted fashion. None knew better than the

framers of these counsels that each day brings its claims, its tasks, its worries and troubles, that for no one does existence roll quite smoothly, without ups and downs, and sometimes crises and sorrows that leave deep traces; yet in spite of all these, or perhaps on that very account, they praised the merry heart, the blithe and buoyant spirit, as a possession to be envied, a gift to be cultivated.

That they did so is proof both of their real wisdom and their real humanity; just as on the other hand the most inhuman thing in Ecclesiastes is the remark, "I said of laughter, It is mad, and of mirth, What doeth it?" Your pessimist is not content to be miserable himself; he is offended that other people should presume to be having a good time of it, and to indulge in happy smiles and laughter, instead of wringing their hands and deploring their lot: the only thing that consoles him is the reflection that his carefully cultivated sense of wretchedness shows him to be a very superior person, while those who enjoy life are plainly mad! It was the same with the Pharisees; they practised so many abstinences and mortifications—which made them feel so very virtuous and uncomfortable—that they were terribly annoyed with normal, ordinary mortals who lived ordinary, normal lives in which, along with toil and trouble, cheerfulness and humour were not wanting. Such people they branded as "sinners"; and their self-righteousness received a terrible shock when they found that Jesus frequented the society of these freer spirits, accepted their hospitality, shared their harmless enjoyment, and showed by His general demeanour that He by no means took a sad or gloomy view of man's nature or destiny.

When they said, with eloquently raised eyebrows, "He eateth with publicans and sinners," they felt that no condemnation could be more scathing or final. What He, in His turn, thought of them and their behaviour comes out with sufficient clearness in the words, "Be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance." Nothing is more characteristic of His outlook than the harmonious words which close the story of the prodigal's restoration, "And they began to be merry."

It is truly strange, in view of our Lord's plain words and avowed attitude, that there should be to this day professed followers of His who look askance, with disapproving eyes, upon all that savours of humour and innocent gaiety. I grant you that there may be some religions whose very principle and essence it is to inculcate a dreary, dismal disposition, which turns suspiciously from all joyfulness as a snare of the Evil One; but the religion of Jesus Christ is Good News—and it is not particularly good news to anyone that this world is the devil's, and that we ought to pass through it with corrugated frowns and every manifestation of aversion. It is an infinite pity that so many good people should have imagined and acted on the assumption that religion was necessarily and predominantly a gloomy thing, for all highly vital natures—and especially the young—instinctively hate gloom, and are repelled by a religion which mistakenly proclaims the holiness of ugliness. I see much more to be admired in the exuberance of a Salvation Army service, in a hymn every verse of which ends with "Hallelujah, what a Saviour!" than in all the decorous, unsmiling grey-in-grey that passes as good form in religion. Who should be buoyant, good-humoured, glad-eyed, if

not Christian folk? Do not, I beg of you, let us identify religion with owlish and sepulchral airs, or even with particularly plain and unbecoming garb, as though an offence to taste were really an outer sign of godliness—the connection is quite imaginary. I have always sympathised with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's quaintly despairing remark when his gifted sister Christina became a novice of an Anglican convent at Clewer: "Here is Christina, who has entered the religious life, and made herself look exactly like a penwiper!" And I am bound to say that one has known some excellent religious people conscientiously and deliberately affect a style that cast a chill over a summer's day. What a mistake! Jesus said—if I may modernise His words, while retaining their meaning,—"But you, when you are engaged in the exercise of your religion, let your manner, your looks and even your dress attest your cheerfulness."

The truth is that all the sombreness, drabness, melancholy, that too often are associated with religion, are the result of sombre and terrifying doctrines imported into Christianity by others than its Divine Founder. Life is serious enough for most of us—we need not dim its lights and deepen its shadows. Sin is real and actual enough—we need not invent artificial transgressions, and scowl mirth out of existence. I can quite understand that where the old dogmas of total depravity, a wrathful Deity and everlasting torments were thoroughly believed, human existence was overshadowed by a perpetual fear; but we have shaken off these nightmare imaginings, which owe nothing to Christ, and have needlessly darkened myriads of lives. The truth is, as Mr. Brierley once

expressed it in *The Christian World*, that too many theologians have been dyspeptic to begin with, and their unfortunate biliousness coloured their doctrine. It is not uncharitable but the reverse to account for what is most repugnant in Calvinism by Calvin's truly atrocious health ; and lesser men than the great arch-dogmatist might have given forth a more cheerful theology, had they been cured of dyspepsia.

But one serious fact is this—that a gloomy and forbidding religion will always turn to gloomy pleasures of its own, it will inevitably be a persecuting and intolerant religion. Calvin's reign over Geneva was little short of a reign of terror, and culminated in a deed—the burning of Michael Servetus—which even in those days was regarded with horrified aversion ; and his successors to this day have ever been eager to indulge in heresy-hunts and the boycott of those who were honestly unable to repeat their intellectual shibboleths. How a little saving sense of humour would have prevented all these futile persecuting tactics ! Has it ever struck you how terribly unhumorous—I use the term advisedly—bigotry always is ? Take the classical example, the Athanasian Creed, with its long, rambling, self-contradictory statements about the mystery of the Trinity—quite unintelligible stuff of no particular importance—which, it says, "except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." Now all I have got to say about such an assertion is that it is just ridiculous, neither more nor less. What its author lacked was exactly that merry heart which doeth good like a medicine—a glimmering sense of the ludicrous, which would have shown him how really silly it was to

suppose that God would inflict everlasting perdition upon a single soul for not holding these particular views about the Trinity, right or wrong. And, if men had realised this, just this—that, after all, our mere opinions concerning Him cannot greatly matter to the Most High God, what floods of blood and tears would have remained unshed, what martyrs' stakes unlit, what horrible wars—miscalled wars of religion—unwaged! Nothing stood Martin Luther in better stead than his rough and homely humour; it was this gift which enabled the reformer to pierce through many solemn disguises of ecclesiasticism, to smile at the Pope's thunders of excommunication, and to bear loads and anxieties which otherwise must have crushed him.

But I wish to turn, if I may, to the value of this blessed gift of the merry heart in our every-day concerns. Some months ago there fell into my hands a novel which, without being in any way great, struck me as being a particularly charming production, entitled "A Spirit of Mirth." It was not at all a rollicking book, but portrayed the battles, struggles and victories of a soul so happily balanced as to see and to seize instinctively the brighter aspects of an existence which knew hunger and cold and poverty and temptation, and a particularly severe trial over which only an irrepressible buoyancy could have triumphed. It is a great help in the routine, the worries and besetments of existence to be able to detect the laughable side, not to take everything, not even ourselves, with unvarying seriousness, and so to overcome depression, to conquer disappointments, to smile bitterness away.

After all, this means just a sense of proportion—and that sense can be encouraged, strengthened and

fostered like any other. There are people who think they are serious when they are merely dull; and alas, often that dulness is cultivated, too, from a mistaken idea that merriment is undignified, until what at first was merely an affectation has become second nature. But there is no merit, as Jesus told us, in being of a sad countenance; there is no superiority in not joining in harmless gaiety. Let us lay hold of a sense of proportion, and it is wonderful how it will increase our patience, our tolerance, our good-humour, and how at the same time we shall meet with the same qualities at the hands of our fellows. I put it to you that the sum of real troubles is at most half of those which men and women quite unnecessarily manufacture and aggravate for themselves—and all for want of a little healing commonsense. It is really lack of humour which makes people so ready to take offence, to construe harmless words and acts into intentional slights, to remain so bitterly incapable of forgiving even real affronts or injuries; it is lack of humour, I mean, which makes these things bulk so large in our sight, when so often we might laugh them off, laugh them out of memory and so out of existence.

It was the same fatal deficiency which made people argue that every sin, being committed against the infinite majesty of God, was itself infinitely sinful, and therefore liable to infinite punishment. I hope I am the last man whom even his opponents would charge with teaching light views of sin—but just imagine the great God of the Universe being infinitely angry with such as ourselves for every trifling transgression, and not to be appeased except by an infinite sentence of doom! The thing is too foolish to survive being thought of.

I am inclined to agree with Mr. Chesterton when he says that "the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear," and I find it easy to believe that the Heavenly Father many a time views our childish attempts to evade His laws, to defy His will, our disobediences and truancies, with the same half-wistful smile with which an earthly parent observes the naughty pranks of his youngsters—pranks which must not go uncorrected, but which in their sheer foolishness have their genuinely amusing side. Now, I suggest, we might take a similar view of each other—yes, and sometimes even of ourselves: it is well to be able to stand a little away from ourselves with humorous scrutiny, to see and say—as all but the most obtuse and priggish must do many a time—"How absurdly I behaved then!" or "How perfectly ludicrous that was of me!" and so to mingle self-reproach with a little self-derision. Believe me, it is not at all a bad way to self-amendment.

And yet again, humour, ridicule if you like, is far and away the best weapon with which to pierce through the self-conceit of officialism, through pretentiousness and every manner of solemn make-believe. Dickens portrays the stupid pomposity of Bumbledom, and Bumbledom disappears in an avalanche of laughter. When honest mirth provoked by dulness or vanity shakes and cleanses the atmosphere, a good many conventional fabrics tremble and go down. No one could wield the lambent steel of satire with more terrific, yet wholesome, effect than the Apostle Paul. When he writes to the unruly Corinthians asking them to show indulgence with his foolishness, and adding, "For ye bear with the foolish gladly, being wise your-

selves"—how uncomfortable his readers must have felt, and with what deadly precision he lanced the tumour of their conceit! And, to go to quite another quarter, you remember how in the "Merchant of Venice," when the posturing, melancholy Antonio has given expression to the highly "superior" sentiment—

> I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano,
> A stage where every man must play a part,
> And mine a sad one—

Gratiano, or rather the poet himself, bursts in with the healthy rejoinder:—

> Why should a man whose blood is warm within
> Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster,
> Sleep when he wakes, and creep into the jaundice
> By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio,
> There are a sort of men whose visages
> Do cream and mantle like a standing pool,
> And do a wilful stillness entertain
> With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
> Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit . . .

Exactly; and the poet is most happy in his simile of the standing pool, for stagnant water breeds corruption, and the sad countenance and dismal gravity are too often mere disguises assumed to hide far different dispositions; they are, and always have been, part of the stock-in-trade of the type which for a pretence makes long prayers. And it is a fortunate circumstance that this is exactly the type which is most defenceless against ridicule—all the dealers in superstition, whether it be the superstitions of priestcraft or of statecraft: it was the merciless shafts of Voltaire's

satire which killed the domination of the Roman Church in France, and I think myself that it was very largely the breath of laughter—indignant laughter, it is true—which put out the lurid flames of the orthodox hell.

But it is above all, as I have said already, in our daily pursuits, with their friction, their monotony, their major and minor jars, that the merry heart is a possession devoutly to be desired—and a possession, let me hint it again, more insistently this time, which is far more easily within our reach than we are apt to imagine. Now listen. This probably sounds a hard doctrine to believe, but I feel convinced that you can discover its truth by practising it. Things go all awry, and how can you help being depressed? But, my brother or sister, you are not simply so much plastic material, just to take the impress of outward circumstance! Here is this wax cylinder, which we call a phonograph record, and when it revolves it plays this particular tune and no other. But you are not like that: the tune *you* play depends, in part at least, upon yourself—you can enliven even a dull theme, so I am told, by a tripping accompaniment. And so you need not be so entirely depressed even when things go provokingly wrong—as they will at times; you need not luxuriate in grief, even though something grievous have befallen you. Our own attitude to events matters at least as much as do the events themselves. And the world shows us very much the same face that we show to the world. We create our own atmosphere to a very large extent. It is a positive fact that by resolutely smiling at difficulties we put ourselves in a better position for surmounting them; it is also a fact

that our facial expression is very much under our control, and that it lies with us whether we exhibit a dejected or a hopeful mien, whether we frown or let eyes and mouth and brow look serene. We think the feeling determines the expression ; as a matter of fact, it is just as true that the expression shapes and induces the feeling. And now I want simply to turn round the saying " A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance " into " A cheerful countenance maketh a merry heart." It may sound a paradox, but, like other seeming paradoxes, it is strictly true.

One must needs in this connection quote Stevenson—a chronic invalid, suffering atrociously, yet deliberately pursuing what he called his great task of happiness, pursuing it as an act of decent gratitude to God, as an act of decent fairness to his fellows whom he did not wish to render miserable by exhibiting a fretful temper or giving way to low spirits. Dr. Kelman speaks rightly of Stevenson's " bright and daring gaiety," even in the darkest seasons : he would point his telescope right into the uttermost blackness—and discover a star. " Give us," he prays with and for his household, " to awaken with smiles, give us to labour smiling " ; and again, " Give us to go blithely on our business : help us to perform the petty round of irritating concerns with laughter and kind faces." And he understood his own case so well—" Werena my heart licht, I wad dee," he says, and doubtless it was the cultivation of brightness that did him good as a medicine, and kept him alive where a despondent patient would have succumbed years before. " Literally," he writes, after one of those attacks of hæmorrhage, for which he invented a characteristic nick-name, " Literally, no

man has more wholly outlived life than I: *and still it's good fun.*"

Friends, I do not say that we are to attain to quite such heroic heights, but we can imitate those who have done so. Let us preserve, and help others to preserve, the merry heart, the buoyant spirit, the hopeful disposition; ward off the black demons of dejection, melancholy, despair; let laughter and smiles and kindliness have as large a share as may be in our lives; live as if we believed that Christ's Gospel really was tidings of great joy. "Have you ever contributed to the happiness of the world?" asks one character of another in a German story; "Yes," is the reply, "I have been very happy myself." I knew someone who was highly shocked by the answer, but I believe it contains an essential truth. For God's intent is that men, His children, should be happy, and the last thing a father grudges to his children is a spirit of mirth. For "melancholy," it has been well said, "should be an interlude" at most; "praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live." Therefore let us choose life; so shall God's will be done not as an irksome task, but with joy and thanksgiving, and gladness reign on earth as it does in heaven.

VII

THE PRICE OF TRUTH

"Buy the truth, and sell it not."—PROV. xxiii. 23.

IN these Sunday morning talks about the Book of Proverbs we have had occasion again and again to insist upon the practical nature of its contents. These counsels deal with the problems and emergencies of every day, with the concrete and tangible realities of existence; the writers give the kind of sensible advice which sensible people will take to heart in their own interests, because that is the way to get the most satisfaction out of life, to avoid its pitfalls, to enjoy its true blessings, to turn its opportunities to best account. You could imagine a man who can look back upon an active and prosperous business career—a career which has widened his horizon, sharpened his powers of observation, brought him into constant contact with a great variety of people—you could imagine such a one, in the evening of his day, giving us his reflections on conduct and character in these shrewd and pointed aphorisms; they all start from a basis of experience, and form what might be called a guide to success in life. We have incitements to industry, warnings against excesses and disordered desires, praises of temperance and self-control—often avowedly on quite utilitarian grounds; while indolence, rash temper, entanglements

of finance or passion are warned against because they lead to disastrous results.

It cannot be denied that one sometimes feels that virtue, in these chapters, wears rather too much of a prudential complexion—it is commended as a sound investment which will yield satisfactory returns. The advice is excellent so far as it goes, it is the embodiment of sterling commonsense — but we listen in vain for the heroic note, for any generous sentiment, any call to unselfishness or disinterested service. One freely admits the merits of this plodding, respectable morality; at the same time it soars to no great heights, it leaves certain deep-seated instincts in us unappealed to, practically unrecognised.

All this makes more remarkable the utterance to which I would draw your attention this morning—"Buy the truth, and sell it not." Wedged in between warnings against the evil effects that attend gluttony and drunkenness come these startling words, a ray of sheer idealism, which lights up the whole page. Here are no calculations of profit as it is understood in the market-place and the counting-house; here is no commendation of virtue on the ground that experience shows it to pay better in the long run than its opposite, nor the spirit which declares honesty to be the best policy—a maxim which might have been penned by any convicted pickpocket—but truth is praised for its own sake as a supreme possession, to be acquired and not to be parted with on any consideration; it is like that pearl of great price which a merchant found, and in exchange for which he gave all that he had.

It seems to me that this sudden and frankly unexpected outburst of a purely idealistic sentiment in such

surroundings is in itself highly significant. There is this vein of idealism embedded in human nature, part of our inalienable endowment from on high, even while we may not be aware of it in ourselves or in those in whose midst we pass our days. We think that they and we are moved in the main by purely self-regarding considerations; we are conscious, and see them conscious, of no particularly altruistic stirrings; day succeeds day in the same struggle to maintain and increase our earnings if we can, to keep to the windward side of adversity, to provide respectably for ourselves and ours, to buy and sell to best advantage, and there it seems to end. And yet that is only surface—a pretty hard surface, I grant you; but let occasion arise, let a great emergency suddenly press its claims upon us, and it is astonishing how commonplace, ordinary humanity rises to it, responds unflinchingly to the call for unselfishness and fine conduct. Through that hard surface of concrete burst unsuspected floods of generosity, of kindliness, of heroism, there reveal themselves capacities for self-sacrifice that surprise us. You know there is never an accident of the mine or the sea, of fire or railway, but some obscure fellow-mortal exhibits qualities of cool courage, deliberate self-surrender, with which no one would have credited him, but which simply slumbered in the depths of his being, to be aroused in the hour of need.

> Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
> But not quite so sunk that moments,
> Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
> When the spirit's true endowments
> Stand out plainly from the false ones,
> And apprise it if pursuing
> Or the right way or the wrong way,
> To its triumph or undoing.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby swoln ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse
Which for once had play unstifled
Seems the sole work of a lifetime
That away the rest have trifled.

Just this or that impulse called forth by some notable emergency, and given free play, reveals the truth about a man or woman in a flash, shows up the best that is in them, more effectively than years of monotonous routine ; and of such unsuspected faculties, which reveal a familiar personage under quite a new and unfamiliar aspect, that love of truth for its own sake, of which our text speaks, the sense of its supreme and incomparable value, is not the least remarkable. We thought these writers of proverbs exclusively concerned with a fairly self-regarding morality, a wisdom mainly of this world—and lo ! here we come upon a most unworldly sentiment, an enthusiasm which extols truth above all earthly prizes and awards.

And then, is it not a fact, and a very noteworthy fact, that it is such enthusiasms as these that speak to our instincts, that " find " us and move us, far more surely and powerfully than all appeals to mere self-interest ? You point out what men will do and dare and endure for the sake of gain, or in order to satisfy some craving or appetite. Granted : but how much more men have done and dared and endured at the instance of quite unselfish motives—from love of country, love of mankind, love of God, love of truth. There is no danger, there is no suffering that has deterred patriots, reformers, bold thinkers, prophets and apostles, ay, and

myriads of humble souls that have beheld the beatific vision. They offer Spinoza, in his bare garret, a lucrative academic appointment, on condition that he will say nothing to upset the creed of the established Lutheran Church—and he prefers poverty together with liberty to follow truth; they offer Giordano Bruno his life if he will recant his heresies, but he prefers to go to the stake and keep his allegiance to the truth untarnished. And the greatest dynamic in the world is the Cross of Christ, the symbol of His martyrdom for truth, and of truth's all-conquering power.

The fact is that deep down in our hearts—when we are really honest with ourselves—there is the intuitive certainty that truth is best for us, after all; that we were meant to seek it and serve it, and that it cannot hurt us; that, as the New Testament expresses it, we can do nothing against the truth, but with the truth. Of course there are any number of far more marketable commodities; there are plenty of buyers for every kind of make-believe; there are those who will be glad and grateful for pious fictions in the domain, either of religion, or in any other for the matter of that—who are nervously afraid of the truth, and eager to be fended off from reality. Instances of this kind of temper are only too plentiful; let me name one or two.

In the religious world it is notorious that there is an immense deal of popularity and outward success to be gained by anyone who will help large sections of the public to go on thinking that nothing has happened to shake the traditional conceptions of their grandparents. I daresay you have all heard the familiar story of the excellent lady who said to her minister, "Oh, Mr.

So-and-so, even if there is anything in this 'Evolution' or whatever you call it, can't it be hushed up ?" The story may be fiction, but the attitude which it denotes is common enough. Any number of people will, for as long as it is possible, and far longer than is decent, deliberately keep themselves ignorant of the conclusions of modern scholars concerning the Bible, secretly wishing that even if there is anything in them, it might be hushed up, kept dark, left unmentioned; and alas, so many religious teachers leave this subject carefully alone, keeping silence on topics with which their College training and private reading have rendered them quite familiar, and excusing themselves with the threadbare phrase about the pews not being ripe for these things! Well, all I can say is that this aversion to facing the truth is full of danger; for truth is like the tide of the ocean, and the poor attempts to keep it back, or sweep it back, are not only predestined to fail, but are doing an immense deal of mischief into the bargain.

Suffer me, for a minute or two, to speak my mind quite freely upon this subject. The new knowledge of the Bible is being taught in every University, in every theological College of any standing; the facts are to be learned by anyone who will spend a shilling on primers like those of Principal Adeney, Mr. Bernard Snell, Mr. Rhondda Williams, Dr. Boyd Carpenter—and now I see even a sixpenny book by Drs. Bennett and Adeney on "The Bible in the Light of the Higher Criticism" announced for publication. That being so, and the conclusions of scholarship being in the main no longer even in doubt, it is simply tragic that any body of Christian people should lend their countenance

to a kind of Bible Study—save the mark!—which simply ignores the results of modern investigation, and which can only excite the contempt of educated people. The truth really does not wait upon our likes and dislikes; but the worst thing that can happen to the Churches is that the impression should go forth that they cannot face facts. We might as usefully spend our energy and our substance on an attempt to rehabilitate the old Ptolemaic astronomy as the old uncritical view of the Bible—and with less peril. "Buy the truth, and sell it not," betray it not, scorn it not; it is only from evasions, from suppressions, from self-deceptions that we have anything to fear, from building on foundations that will not bear!

And in quite another direction the same disinclination to read and accept clear facts may be found. The attempts made by a large portion of our Press to ignore or explain away the patent truth about the unhappy condition of Persia, and the inglorious part played in this matter by our own country, affords quite a startling object-lesson. By every conceivable means it has been sought to conceal what is quite palpable—that those who act for us have been outwitted by an unscrupulous partner in the unscrupulous game of diplomacy, while the interests of a weak and struggling nationality have been ruthlessly sacrificed. And all the desperate endeavours to get away from the real issue will not alter the facts, or avert the consequences; for, believe me, it is better to buy the truth, to recognise it frankly, than to sell it—in the latter case we only sell ourselves.

It is the same temper which stands in the road of every reform, it rises as a wall of defence behind

which every kind of evil is safely sheltered. Wrong-doers of most descriptions, the systematic exploiters of their fellow-creatures, can generally reckon upon the timidity of people who would rather not look at the truth if it happens to be unpleasant, or who, if they must look, will only do so through rose-coloured spectacles. It is much more comfortable to ignore the facts about sweating, about overcrowding, about the horrors of the rubber traffic, about the ruthless strangling of Persia, and our share in the responsibility for it—much more comfortable *for us*, that is to say, though very much the reverse of comfortable for the victims of these abominations. It is the most difficult thing in the world to bring it home to the public that abuses exist, because to acknowledge their existence means to exert ourselves to abolish them. And it is only the spirit of truth that will lead to their abolition, and vanquish the powers of darkness.

"Buy the truth"—but how, and where, and at what price? Well, there are many kinds of payment which we shall have to make in order to come into possession of this shining gem. We shall have to pay with patient and persevering study, to begin with, so far as real knowledge and understanding are concerned. Ours is an age of hurry and superficiality, tendencies which are nowhere mirrored so faithfully as in our feverish journalism. Fifty years ago, with books fewer and more expensive, with cheap reprints almost unknown, there was a good deal of solid reading of solid books; but to-day we want our information in tabloid form, quickly assimilated, paragraphs that can be taken in at a glance—and the result is that it was never,

perhaps, so easy to mislead vast numbers of the public by means of glaring misrepresentations. People who will not *buy* the truth, who will not pay what it is worth in hard thinking and reading, must be content with such shoddy imitations and perversions of it as flood the market. The purveyors of this kind of rubbish know their constituency, and take its measure with cynical accuracy; they know that these are people who are ignorant, and can easily be worked up into a panic or a war-scare, that they will believe the wildest inventions that can be circulated for party purposes, or in order to play the game of some powerful vested interest. Do you say, "What has all this to do with religion?" But, friends, all truth has religious value and religious sanctity; and progress and well-being are grievously delayed by an uninstructed democracy, by the type which cares only for sensational items picturesquely served up, but has not the patience to pay for the knowledge of the truth in steady and concentrated thought and study—and only the truth can make a people free.

And again, those who would buy this possession will many and many a time have to pay in popularity and favour; in any case—and to this rule there is no exception—they will have to set out with the determination that personal advantage, applause, the chance of preferment, shall not be allowed to weigh with them at all. The man who reasons within himself after this fashion, "Yes, I will buy the truth, provided it does not cost me too dear," has in his heart already sold it. What fills us with such admiration in reading the story of natural science and its progress is the absolute devotion to truth, almost

always in the teeth of prejudice and persecution, of the great pioneers, the path-finders, the innovators. They felt that they had no choice, that compromise was out of the question, and so they forged ahead through good report and evil report—chiefly the latter—believing in the absolute duty of loyalty to truth, and in its power to stand and prevail. Turn in what direction you will—astronomy, geology, biology—it has been the same tale, the tale of men who were quite ready to suffer for their convictions, assured that when the dust of controversy had cleared away, and the angry cries of obscurantists had died down, wisdom would be justified of her children. The scorn with which Darwin's great treatise was received, the superior manner in which it was dismissed as "unscientific," are matter of history; but the scorners and superior persons have long since been forgotten, while Darwin's name will be remembered for ever in the chronicles of human advance, enshrined in the pantheon of humanity's greatest sons.

Yes, Truth requires from her votaries an absolute singleness of aim, a vision not to be deflected by glittering bribes or the fear of missing them. There is no story of modern times that shows such a perfect blending of courage, serenity and self-consecration to truth as the life of Bishop Colenso, the pioneer of the scientific study of the Old Testament in the English-speaking world. He had everything to gain by keeping his unorthodox conclusions to himself, and everything to lose by making them public; he had, after all, only to keep quiet on this one topic, full as his life was of other interests; but I do not think it ever occurred to him to shield himself or to save his career in the Church

by cowardly silence. You remember his own account of the circumstances which first turned his mind to Old Testament criticism: "While translating the story of the Flood, I have had a simple-minded but intelligent native look up and ask, 'Is all that true? Do you really believe that all this happened so—that all the beasts and birds and creeping things upon the earth, large and small, from hot countries and cold, came thus by pairs and entered into the ark with Noah? And did Noah gather food for them *all*, for the beasts and birds of prey, as well as for the rest?' My heart answered in the words of the prophet, 'Shall a man speak lies in the name of the Lord?' *I dared not do so.*" Reckless and malicious attacks, virtual deposition from his office, a general boycott followed, but could not deter him from following along the path he believed, and rightly believed, to be the true one. "I trust," he wrote, "that I duly reverence both the Church and the Bible. But the truth is above both"; and the one thing that pained him was to see how little love of truth there was among those from whom he had hoped most. Well, he bore the obloquy, the isolation, the loss inflicted upon him by bigotry, and to-day the views for which he suffered are those of educated people everywhere; but it was he and such as he who paid the price of truth, and the least we can do is to cherish the possessions they bought at such a cost.

But I must hasten on to my last—which is also my most important—point, though I shall have to content myself with treating it very briefly. It is not only truth in the sense of knowledge we want, but, above all, truth in action, in our relationships to each other, in

our relation to God; and for such truth we pay no less a price than life itself—not by laying it down in one act of renunciation, but by making it one continuous act of dedication. We must practise what is by no means easy—an entire and resolute candour with ourselves, a strict scrutiny of our own motives, we must exercise an untiring watchfulness over the springs of conduct; we must, in one word, buy the truth by being true in thought and word and deed. Right opinions are very good and worth having, but right opinions by themselves have never yet saved a soul. During some great revivalistic campaign you have had little cards thrust into your hands in the street by well-meaning, fussy people, bearing the inscription, "Get right with God," the idea being that you could do so once for all by professing conversion and faith in the atoning merits of the Saviour's death. But there is no such short-and-easy method of "getting right"; you do not buy saving truth by paying a stipulated amount across a celestial counter once, and then carry it away with you; you have to keep on paying, day by day, hour by hour, and the price, as I already intimated, is nothing less than life—gentle, upright, courageous, equitable, dutiful, generous, forgiving. That alone is the true life, and we have not only to know the truth, but to live it.

Do we ask in what way we are—I will not say, to achieve, but to aim at, such an ideal? There is but one obvious answer—by following after Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ. We are none of us self-sufficient; we need almost continually, in order to correct our own estimate of ourselves, the external standard of general opinion; we need,

above all, to keep our glance fixed upon that standard of ideal manhood which we have in the Person of our Lord. He is the Truth, not only about God, whose love we read and experience in Him, but the truth also about man, and man's relation to God, as it is meant to be. It is by His perfection that we measure and may correct our imperfection, by His attainment that we are to kindle our aspiration. And He, too, paid the price of truth, buying, not selling it—the price of thought, the price of popularity, the price of life. May we keep His glorious humanity ever before us, calling and beckoning us on, till we all attain "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"—to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

VIII

THE TEST OF PRAISE

"The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, and a man is tried by his praise."—PROV. xxvii. 21.

THE other day, when listening to that wonderful, ever-young veteran, Dr. Clifford, I was specially struck by one among the many memorable observations that fell from his lips: "Cain," he said, "is at a discount nowadays; he can't even get into respectable society unless he calls himself Abel." It was just one of those brilliant flashes of thought and phrasing that light up whole wide tracts, if only for an instant. "Cain can't get into respectable society unless he calls himself Abel." The man with bad motives must skilfully hide them, and at least make a pretence that they are good ones. The speculator who desires the annexation of territories where he wants a free hand in making profits never avows his mercantile aims, but appeals to patriotic sentiment. The bigot, anxious to indulge his taste for theological persecution, will invariably pose as a zealous defender of the faith. A politician, intent on safeguarding the sacred rights of capital, will oppose the demand of full-grown men for a minimum wage of five shillings for a day's work underground, in a key of virtuous indignation, and describe such a demand as exceeding the cruelty of feudal barons and American

trusts. And all these tactics, so varied in themselves, prove one thing, and prove it very abundantly—the dependence of a man on the opinion of his fellows, the universal anxiety to earn, if possible, their praise—to avoid, if that should be impossible, at any rate their censure, not to incur their active displeasure. Nothing is more natural than this instinct which bids us seek to stand well with those who can visit their disapprobation upon us in every variety of ways—no motive more powerful or far-reaching in its effects than the desire for recognition, for popularity, for praise.

It would have been strange indeed if in such a store-house of reflections on human nature as the Book of Proverbs there had not been any reference to this topic of all others, to a proclivity which notoriously sways the minds and actions of men more than most; and in the chapter (xxvii.) part of which we read again this morning, you notice that it is more than once touched upon under various aspects. "Let another man praise thee," we are admonished, "and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." "Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden. Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are profuse." Last of all—and most pointed of all—come the words of our text, which declare that "a man is tried by his praise."

We are all anxious for praise, and justifiably, indeed inevitably, so; and yet it is a truism that this natural wish, unless it is well and wisely guarded, and kept under control, may be and has been many a man's undoing. If we may keep to the image we have employed on a previous occasion—the image of an experienced and

prosperous man of the world, a shrewd judge of men and matters, giving us, in the evening of his day, the benefit of his experiences and observations, we can fancy such a one expressing himself somewhat in this fashion: "I have seen people under most sorts of trials and difficulties; I have seen them tried by poverty, tried by an obstinate and inexplicable run of unsuccess, by physical infirmity that made every effort doubly and trebly hard, by neglect and want of appreciation, by darkness and doubt of God's care and goodness—and I have seen them overcome all these; but a rock on which I have witnessed more people come to grief than on most others has been praise and popularity—both the desire and the thing itself."

We may think it a paradox when Jesus says, "Woe unto you when all shall speak well of you," but the seeming paradox is based on the keenest insight into human nature. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred such a universal popularity will have been purchased at too great a price, at the cost of principle, self-respect, loyalty to truth; to please everybody is a dangerous enterprise, dangerous to oneself. To have no enemies, no detractors, must mean that a man has acquired considerable skill in moral tight-rope walking and seeming to be on both sides at one and the same time—and that just for the sake of having the good opinion of all and sundry. No, no—the thing that tests a man more than any other trial is his attitude towards praise and what other people think of him. Let us look at this subject, then, for a short while together this morning, and see if we cannot discover certain leading principles for our guidance; and may I say this in passing—I trust that no one here feels that

when we are dealing with these questions of conduct and practice, we are any the less occupied with religion, for indeed we look upon faith and works not as two things, but as the two sides of one and the same.

To begin with, let us admit that we are all shaped and influenced for better or worse, to an incalculable extent, by the verdicts, the appreciation, the good or bad opinion of those in whose midst we move, and it is hard —we all know how hard, except those who have never tried—to stand against that pressure. A dozen times in the course of every day we are reminded that no one liveth to himself, and that our little world will not hesitate to pass its judgment upon our actions and general demeanour. Generally speaking, it is true that this verdict is informed with a rough justice ; it serves to remind us, and sometimes sharply, that the eyes of our fellows are on us, and that we must not think we can go on in independence of their approval or disapproval. Those eyes are quick to detect meanness, conceit, self-seeking, a vindictive or ungenerous spirit, nor are their owners usually backward in visiting these things with their censure ; and since we are all of us given to self-deception and possess abundant resource in fashioning excuses for ourselves, it is just as well that there should be this force of public opinion to correct our own estimate of ourselves, a force which in the last resort can make itself unmistakably felt. In this simplest sense of all a man is tried by his praise ; that is to say, there is a permanent tribunal sitting, a permanent jury empanelled, to try him, occupied in weighing him day by day, and expressing its findings in swift and summary fashion. The people who work by our side in the office ; our colleagues in the school or

on a committee; our employees and dependents; all these have a pretty shrewd idea of our qualities and defects—and their idea is worth listening to. They could give us an outside view of ourselves that might amaze us; yes, and the members of our own households, too, could assess us all too accurately—let us be thankful for their forbearance! You know the Rugby schoolboy's summing-up of Dr. Temple when the latter was headmaster: "Temple's a beast, but he's a *just* beast." Well, you had it all there, and it was pretty correct, both the noun and the adjective.

But now let us go a step forward; a man is tried not only by the praise or otherwise which he *receives*, but also and especially by the praise he *seeks*, and those from whom he seeks it. The lowest and the highest ambitions find their scope and expression here. It is quite right and unavoidable that we should value the judgment of others, for we are not self-sufficient, nor meant to be; but *who those others are*, by whose commendation we set store—that is the great and all-important question! Whose good opinion, whose applause, do we want? With what set or section are we eager to be popular? That is one of the truest and at the same time most searching tests of our real worth. Yes, men and women are tried, their value is assessed by the calibre of those who praise them; the mob will always have its darlings, but they will be such darlings as the mob can appreciate, finding its own qualities faithfully portrayed in them. The sensational novelist, or for the matter of that the sensational preacher, will have his enthusiastic public among the shallow and thoughtless, but it is

a public whose enthusiasm one would not wish to arouse, because they do not understand or enjoy anything better than printed or spoken trash. Once more, *whose* praise do we desire to receive? It comes back to this, that in the last analysis we are judged by our ideals. Here is this student working under a master who is such in reality and not only in name—accomplished, severe, not easily satisfied, but an unfailing judge of good work: to win a word of praise from him—that is an ambition worth cherishing, something to live up to, to work up to, for if *he* declares the performance good, that proves it so. Anybody can win plaudits of a kind, and from a certain type, if he is willing to address his appeal to them; but we must aim high if we are to achieve anything of real worth. The tragedy of so many lives is this, that men are content with running after paltry prizes, and show the greatest solicitude to obtain the approval of some little circle or coterie whose opinion really carries no weight whatever, except possibly in the distribution of official smiles and emoluments. And when we think of the despicable things men have done in order to gain the most trivial and perishable laurels, how they have suppressed their convictions, falsified their principles, sold their very souls for popularity, we blush for shame. Do you know—to give just one illustration—who are the great hinderers of the work of religious reconstruction in the light of modern thought and knowledge? It is not the out-and-out adherents to conservative positions—it is the men who hold the modern views, but hold them privately, *very* privately, because they desire to stand well with the powers that be; and the irony of it is that these are the people who are actually praised and held

up to us as models for their moderation and discreetness in keeping silence—is it not true that a man is tried by his praise? But "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"—that remains the true counsel; when we refer our doings humbly and faithfully to the judgment of our Father in Heaven, when we endeavour to be conformed to the image of His dear Son, when we earnestly commend ourselves to Him, then we are in the way of obtaining His commendation, His soul-satisfying praise, His "well done"—and what else is there besides this that counts?

But I turn for a moment to another, earthlier aspect of our theme. You know from your own experience how you have been encouraged by a timely word of appreciation, discouraged because it was withheld, and you felt that all your efforts did not matter, made no impression. Well now, are we ready enough in bestowing that encouragement, which so often would make all the difference between a hearty and a listless discharge of duties? We do not get the best out of a horse, far less out of a human being, without the use of an occasional show of appreciation, of gratitude for work done, for value received; and it is one of the greatest mistakes to be ungraciously grudging with our praise where praise has been earned; for there are few things more depressing than to feel that after all nobody cares whether we do our work well or ill. "Better is open rebuke than love which is hidden." Some people seem to be positively afraid of showing that they are well pleased; they will tell you that they don't wear their hearts on their sleeves—they don't want to be like demonstrative Frenchmen, and so they go to

the other extreme; but I put it to you that there is a happy mean between frothy effusiveness and that show of stony indifference which takes the heart out of willing service, and chills and kills enthusiasm. True, plenty of people have had their heads turned by sheer excess of flattery; but since we are not given to that form of indulgence, let us remember that others have had their hearts frozen by a lumpish apathy which could not express pleasure or even interest.

But now I want to call your attention to quite another reading of our text, which gives a different turn altogether to the meaning, and yet adds, if anything, to its significance. Instead of "a man is tried by his praise" the margin of the Revised Version renders the original, "a man is tried by that which he praiseth"—and here surely we have a perfect fund of suggestive thought. For there is nothing so self-revealing as our opinions, our tastes and antipathies; in these we express our inmost selves, and that the more unreservedly because we do so for the most part quite unconsciously. If we want a sure criterion of anyone's character, we ask almost at once, or we try to discover by observation, what kind of thing he likes, what moves him to sympathy, what receives his praise. These are indications which never lie, which tell a perfectly plain and straightforward tale. To give a very obvious illustration, we shall all admit that a rapid survey of a man's store of books is almost as good and illuminating as if we had had a glimpse of his inner being; for to the contents of those shelves the contents of his mind must in some measure correspond. What does he "praise," what does he delight in, in literature; is it the genuinely

fine, the distilled best of the world's thought? Or is it the shoddy, the trashy, the unwholesome? A great man of letters, one of the few survivors from the Victorian era, has lately taken the world into his confidence by discoursing pleasantly about his books; and it is impossible to read these papers of Mr. Frederic Harrison's without feeling that here is a man who has deliberately nourished his mind and character on all that is of sterling worth, all that stimulates and conduces to fine thought and action. Tried by what he praises, he is shown a lover of whatsoever things are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, of good report; he has furnished us with a better means of judging him in these genial and almost casual talks than in his long autobiography—and happy is the man who comes out so well after giving this kind of evidence about himself.

But, judged by the same criterion, how many people are not merely tried but condemned, tried and found wanting, by what they praise! What fatal praise is given every day to unworthy qualities and performances! I think that there are few things more lamentable to witness than the hearty appreciation with which numbers of men and women follow the most doubtful exploits, the court that is paid to any blatant success, the homage rendered to ostentatious luxury, the awestruck worship of Mammon and Moloch—wealth and force—these twin-idols of many professed followers of the Man of Nazareth who had not where to lay His head. The mere fact that a man is rich, no matter how he has acquired his possessions, suffices in the eyes of many people to invest him with extraordinary attributes; he is lifted above the ranks of common mortals, the masses who toil to keep them-

selves alive; he claims and receives respect and defence simply on the strength of a bulging bank-balance, and his power to scatter largesse opens for him the doors of even select circles—should he wish it, in too many instances even the doors of the sanctuary itself. How many Churches dare refuse notoriously tainted money? And might we not learn from the example of the Synagogue, which will have no fellowship with the professional usurer? There has recently appeared a biography of an American multi-millionaire—one of those personages possessed of the one sinister talent of making big industrial undertakings yield huge fortunes to himself, and a pittance to tens of thousands of workers engaged in them; yet his biographer speaks of the great man in accents of almost pious awe, with bated breath—he evidently ranks him quite sincerely with the choice and master spirits of the age—and I have no doubt at all that his attitude is typical of that of scores of thousands in two continents. Well, men are tried by what they praise, and this vulgar adoration paid to the golden calf is the sure mark of vulgar souls, upon whom it apparently has not yet dawned that though they may foregather in Christian Churches Sunday by Sunday, they cannot worship both God *and* Mammon!

And precisely the same applies to that awful and godless cult of brute force to which one sometimes fears that the nations are becoming more, rather than less, addicted. To talk of righteousness as exalting a nation is to expose oneself to ridicule nowadays: Dreadnoughts exalt a nation, we all know, and super-Dreadnoughts, and plenty of them, and then we need not be so particular about troublesome details of right

and wrong, when the whole issue can be settled by guns and armaments—at least, if we are quite sure of being two to one! Ah, but no issue is ever finally settled by guns and armaments and the mailed fist and superior numbers: Assyria overwhelms Israel and carries it into captivity—but Israel is alive and Assyria has been dead thousands of years, because the breath of life, the spirit of the Lord, was in the one and not in the other. But individuals and nations are tried and tested by what they praise and set store by, and the widespread reliance on material power is a symptom which condemns and shames us.

Far-called, our navies melt away,
  On dune and headland sinks the fire;
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
  Is one with Nineveh and Tyre;
Judge of the nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust
  In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
  And, guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word—
Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord!

And time would fail me were I to enumerate all the poor and worthless objects, attributes, achievements, upon which praise and admiration are lavished by people who little dream that they are furnishing an exact measure of their mental and moral standard by the commendations they bestow. There are persons who really, as the saying is, "love a lord," who look up with respect and even something like affection to those who treat them with insolence, who admire a man who

can afford to live without working: well, they reveal the souls of flunkeys, that is all. One has met persons who are tremendously impressed with the exploits of a swindler who is clever enough to baulk the law; one hesitates to say what kind of verdict *they* pass upon themselves, but one has an uncomfortable feeling that they would like to do the same if they could. And on a somewhat higher plane, are not a great many people far too ready to applaud merely intellectual gifts even when they are unaccompanied by other and finer qualities? I shall always remember an occasion when a group of men were discussing a certain well-known writer, one of us alone indicating, by silence rather than speech, an unfavourable estimate, from which we vainly tried to make him budge. "Well," someone exclaimed as a last resort, "you'll admit at any rate that he's very clever." "Yes," was the reply, given in the quietest tones, "*that's just what he is*"—and we one and all felt rebuked. "The fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, but a man is tried by the thing which he praises."

Here is the conclusion of the whole matter—and if I put it briefly, you will be able to work it out in fuller detail for yourselves: there is no greater need for each one of us than the education of the judgment in the light of Christian principle, for our judgment of men and things trains and portrays our character, and as a man thinketh, such is he. To habituate ourselves to praise and take delight in goodness will stimulate us by the grace of God to practise the like. To look not at the surface glitter and glamour, but at the things that abide and endure, not omitting "that best part of a good man's life, the little nameless,

unremembered acts of kindness and of love" : to esteem strong principle, to prize humble loyalty, to value silent dutifulness rather than show and self-advertisement ; to spend as much time as we are able in the study of lives animated by unselfishness, simplicity, singleness of aim and sympathy with their brethren : that is the training for which none of us is too young or too old. And above all, let us immerse ourselves in the life of Him in whom was life, even the light of men. To acquire not merely a taste but a passion for what is noble and beautiful and uplifting, that is to live truly, for if we are tried by our praise, it is true, as the poet says, that we live by admiration.

> Praise to the Holiest in the height,
> And in the depth be praise,
> In all His words most wonderful,
> Most sure in all His ways !

What more shall we add but this—" Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men ! "

IX

THE EXCELLENCE OF CHARITY

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love."—PROV. xvii. 9.

WHEN the Revised Version of the New Testament appeared, a little over thirty years ago, one of the changes that struck everyone in the new translation was the disappearance of the word "charity," and its replacement by "love." Where people noticed the alteration most was of course in the great thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, where we were now taught to reverence love, not charity, as "the greatest of these"—greater than hope, greater than even faith. Needless to say, the change had not been introduced without due consideration. Charity is one of those words which have come down in the world through being misused and misapplied, made to stand chiefly for alms-giving, and that in not too generous or kindly a spirit, but rather of a perfunctory and official kind. On looking the matter up, I find that the phrase "as cold as charity" had become proverbial in English speech so long ago as the earlier half of the eighteenth century: does not the fact tell its own sad tale? Then, besides the dislike of charity which its coldness excited, men began to view the system of doles with a very proper suspicion and resentment, both because they

saw in it a means of undermining the manhood and independence of the poorer classes, and a cheap substitute for social justice—crumbs thrown from the table of the well-to-do in order to quiet the discontent of the disinherited. Who that knows rural England can deny that charity of this kind has been copiously used as an instrument of political corruption—an engine of snobbery and jobbery? To this day, are there not districts where for a villager to show the colours of the candidate who is frowned upon by the Squire and Parson is to disqualify himself for the Christmas charity of coals and blankets and the like? And in the industrial strata, with their rising self-respect, is there not the strongest objection to all that savours of the patronage of the respectable poor by fussy people of the more prosperous classes who want to fill up a few of their idle hours in a way which ministers to their self-complacency and gives them a gentle glow of satisfaction at a not very exorbitant cost of energy or money? Have we not heard of processions of the unemployed with banners bearing the legend—horribly shocking to respectable sentimentalists!—"Curse your Charity"? Clearly there was a strong case for the course the Revisers took in striking out this unfortunate word from the New Testament and putting another in its place.

Now I know that it is with nouns as with people—once they lose their characters, it is difficult to regain them. And yet I would like to try and put in a plea on behalf of the old word "charity"—to see whether we cannot give it back its former and better meaning. For to tell the truth, one is not quite satisfied with "love" as the substitute for it: love has

come to be so exclusively identified in popular speech with the passion which furnishes the theme of most of our popular fiction, that we instinctively feel that it lacks—nowadays at least—in strength, in sacredness, above all in dignity. Charity, as the term was originally used, was neither a matter of doles and grants nor a mere emotional indulgence; it was neither cold nor soft, but warm and strong; it rested on a basis of character and insight, and went to the making of character in its turn. To be sure, it stood for love in its truest sense—but a love infinitely removed from the sentimentality of the drawing-room ballad or the popular novelette.

Now in our previous talks about the Book of Proverbs we have learnt to esteem these ancient sayings of the Hebrew sages for their close touch with life and conduct, their direct bearing upon the everyday problems we have to solve—the everyday affairs that come home to our business and bosoms. And the collection of these counsels and maxims would have been incomplete indeed without some reference to this attribute of unselfish love, that truly godly attitude and temper in our dealings with others, which is still best described as charity. Twice over the sacred writers give utterance to this sentiment—"Love" (*i.e.*, charity) "covereth all transgressions," and "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love;" and we all remember the New Testament echo, "Charity covereth a multitude of sins." Shall we try to gain a better understanding of this "more excellent way," as the Apostle called it, and ask ourselves just wherein that excellence consists?

Paul himself had begun life as a Pharisee, and in

some respects his training clung to him until his life's end; but he knew what was the root-evil in Pharisaism: this was the sect which delighted in multiplying injunctions and prohibitions, and in so doing multiplied occasions of stumbling and transgression—stumblings which they judged in the most merciless manner. In the end it became the chief pleasure of these men to detect others in the breach of this or that ritual detail, so that they might manifest by contrast their own superior holiness, and lift up hands of pious horror over the transgression of a fellow-mortal. Was not that exactly the object of all the questions they put to Jesus—to prove Him in the wrong, to catch Him in His talk, to expose Him as ignorant or worse than ignorant? And did they not exult when they had ground to suspect Him of woeful laxity and unsoundness! You see, the temper of these men was essentially loveless, essentially uncharitable: they were eaten up with self-righteousness, and to see ordinary people fall short of their lofty standards was meat and drink to them. Would they spare such a one? No, they must make an example of the offender, with the fullest publicity, exact the uttermost farthing of shame and suffering they could inflict, outwardly lamenting, but inwardly rejoicing.

Well now, brethren, it is easy enough to wax virtuously indignant over the Pharisees—they belong to ancient history; but their spirit—that against which Paul invokes the good and gracious spirit of charity—can we say that that is dead? Or do we not know, alas, to the contrary? Are there not still people who, while pretending to deplore the actual or fancied shortcomings of others, in reality gloat over them, who

search out the transgressions and derelictions of their fellows with a bitter and perverted joy, who are possessed with an unholy lust of passing condemnation on the rest of the world, and so gratify their own desire to pose as beings of superior sanctity? They have, as R. L. Stevenson puts it, "a devil of judging": to shame and humiliate another, to bring him to discomfiture—that is triumph, that is an end worth compassing; as for sparing a poor sinner the last humiliation—they would protest against such an act of culpable leniency, of which they would not be guilty. There is a book with the bitterly ironical title "The Tender Mercies of the Good"—and you may imagine that they were neither merciful nor tender, nor specially good.

I do not say that such a temper is often to be met with full-blown; but I do say that we need to beware even of its faintest beginnings, to be on the look-out for any symptoms of it in ourselves. It is this spiritual leprosy, this disease of the soul, Paul glances at, and indirectly describes and rebukes, when he says that charity envieth *not*, is *not* provoked, taketh *not* account of evil, is *not* puffed up, rejoiceth *not* in iniquity, while the uncharitable in their hearts do rejoice in the offences they see others commit, in the trippings and stumblings of frail humanity, in the prospect of seeing punishment meted out, or the still sweeter prospect of administering it themselves—drawing their severe garments severely, but ostentatiously, around them to avoid the defiling touch of the sinner. As a matter of fact, we are most of us prone to that very weakness; and the next time you or I have occasion to discuss some detected failing, someone's downfall, let us try suddenly to flash a light into our own hearts, to see whether we are quite

free from some degree of unholy pleasure and the self-congratulation that we are not as these others !

Friends, the secret of charity is sympathy ; and the great Teacher and perfect Example of sympathy is Jesus Christ. And by sympathy I wish you for the moment to understand what it literally means, viz., fellow-suffering. Jesus suffered from the very sight, from the very fact, of sin—suffered more than the sinners themselves ; it afflicted His consciousness, because He saw in sin the frustration of God's holy purpose, the grievous injury done by souls to themselves—not a spectacle, assuredly, for an amused feeling of one's own superiority. The loveless Pharisee and his modern equivalent *like*—and that is their condemnation—to see hapless men and women go astray, lay up chastisement and disgrace for themselves, and, when the consequences duly mature, they will be the first to say with a chuckle, " I told you so ! " or " Serve him right ! " Poor souls—their very righteousness, their lean and mean respectability, does not spring from any real love of the right, from a devotion to goodness for its own sake, but from prudent calculation and a cautious desire to avoid the unpleasantness which overtakes indulgence ; they would go in for the indulgence too, if there was a way to dodge the results, and when some poor delinquent finds himself caught, their attitude is one of delight that he has at last to pay for the good time they all along envied him while pretending to be scandalised beyond expression. " Let him see how he likes it ! " they say, and their smiles are more eloquent than their words. But, as the Hebrew sage tells us, " He that is glad at calamity "—even deserved calamity for that matter—" shall not go

unpunished"; indeed, his own disposition is his punishment, for he cuts himself off, and that at one stroke and with fatal certainty, from the grace of Christ, from the love of God, and from the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. You can imagine our Lord *predicting* the undoing of the wilful workers of iniquity; you cannot imagine Him *rejoicing* in their fate—nay, on the very cross He prays for His murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Sin grieved the spirit of Jesus, stirred Him to self-sacrificing efforts to remedy it, and unless it has the same effect upon us, we are none of His.

Indeed—to go now a step further—I would suggest, if I may, that while right is right and sin is sin, there are strong reasons which should make us restrain the proclivity to judge and pass sentence upon our fellows. For one thing, our vision is never very clear, and above all, never very penetrating: we see certain facts, but never all the facts, nor the forces behind them. It may or may not be true that "to understand all is to forgive all," but who would deny, going over his own experiences, that if we understood more we should judge less harshly? Burns has put it all in a few lines of wonderful simplicity and insight—you know them by heart:—

One thing must still be greatly dark—
  The moving why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
  How far perhaps they rue it.
Then at the balance let's be mute;
  We never can adjust it;
What's done, we partly may compute,
  But know not what's resisted.

And, further, the slightest self-knowledge, the slightest candour with ourselves, must again and again inspire the question, "Who art thou that judgest?" True, our conscience acquits us of this or that misdemeanour which our brother or sister has committed; but are we so sure that, had we been exposed to precisely the same strain, we should have given a better account of ourselves? Have we not rather cause for gratitude that we have been spared such and such a trial, which might have proved too severe for our principles or our habits? Would not the truer attitude, many and many a time, be that of Newton, the Puritan, who, at the sight of some transgressor being taken off to dire punishment, humbly exclaimed, "But for the grace of God, there goes John Newton"? And if we have not fallen short in this or that particular respect, yet how grievously have we failed in others, and how little should we relish the merciless censure of the unpitying world! Truly, in that consciousness alone we each have sufficient cause for the exercise of charity!

And do not misunderstand me—I do not mean that, since we are all open to rebuke on some count, we had better refrain from stone-throwing lest the compliment should be returned; nor, above all, do I mean that the most unmitigated sinners are the most charitable in dealing with others, for the contrary is notorious. Rather is it the case that those least stained with earth's mire, the true lovers of God, are least prone to harsh and unfeeling condemnations. I remember once hearing an eminent divine—to use the current phrase—predict with an evil sneer what a bad time was in store for those who differed from his views, in the day

when the saints should judge the world: alas, all that he proved was that *he* was no saint, but belonged to a different category altogether. When we read that the saints shall judge the world, poor sinners may take comfort.

But now I want, as briefly as may be, to direct your attention to one word, one phrase, which, while it is frequently misunderstood, or simply left un-understood, really goes to the heart of our subject. What is the meaning of the expression, found twice in Proverbs, and repeated in the New Testament, about charity covering transgressions? There is a real difficulty here, and it touches the whole treatment of the wrong-doer. Are we, where there is a clear-cut moral issue—when we stand face to face with violations of the right—to hold our peace, utter no word of censure, make ourselves accomplices of the delinquent by sheltering him from the consequences he has incurred? Are things to be made pleasant and comfortable for the offender, until in practice there is no difference between innocent and guilty, and a man may come to think that he might just as well choose the path of indulgence, since he will not be called to account? There is a good deal of this kind of charity about, we say, and what good does it do? Look rather at the utter harm it does! Yet what else is meant by "covering" transgression?

Well, certainly, that is *not* meant; indeed, this manner of dealing with problems of conduct is only an emotional and thoroughly unwarrantable luxury—it springs too often from a lack of robust principle, coupled with a dislike of seeing anyone uncomfortable, and succeeds merely in doing further injury to the wrong-

doer himself. We cannot cover his transgression from the clear eye of a just and offended God—we must not cover it from himself by suggesting excuses for him, and so administering opiates to deaden the pangs of conscience. But we may and should, in charity, shield him from the unsympathetic and the pitiless, always ready to jeer and mock at detected guilt, and to add to the guilty one's agony. Let justice be done, punishment meted out—but not everybody is called to be judge or even juryman in every cause. I think, for instance, that a very considerable limit should be set to the publishing of law reports, which as a rule serve only for the delectation of a public greedy of sensation, and liking to take its entertainment in that form—charity, and even decency, would suggest the "covering" of many transgressions with which the Courts of the country deal from the coarse crowd who have no legitimate interest in this man's downfall or that man's crime, but who want to be amused by picturesque descriptions of how the prisoner bore himself under a merciless cross-examination, and how he looked when the judge gave sentence. Cover it, cover it, for pity's sake: who is the better for these details which only pander to a diseased appetite that grows by what it feeds on?

And the same applies to our private relationships. We can be perfectly straight and candid with one who has offended, let him know how his conduct strikes us, how it grieves us—but we can at the same time refrain from needlessly making it known to anyone whose business it is not to know. We need not gratuitously add to the offender's humiliation; there is a legitimate "covering" of his lapse from eyes that have no proper

concern with it, and this should be done in every case where it is possible—alas, the opposite method prevails too often! I remember one extremely painful case, more than twenty years ago now, where a young man, by one superlatively foolish escapade, bade fair to ruin his whole career at the very outset. The gravity of his offence was not minimised, and he paid a price of scalding tears and bitter remorse for it; but it was decided to keep the knowledge of the trouble within local limits, and the penitent culprit was sent to another part of the country where this episode was not known, and where he was allowed, being put on his honour, gradually to rise again, and to regain the position he had forfeited. He was fortunate enough to have friends—thoroughly upright, the salt of the earth—who, just because of their disinterested goodness, covered his transgression, without in any way extenuating his guilt, and so made a new and happier start possible for him: would that such cases were more frequent!

Once more—true charity is no mere leniency that has its root in laxity. To let an offender go scot-free may be no more than to save oneself trouble, or even to show contempt in the guise of pity. No, no: the Gospel itself, with its censure of sin, shows esteem for a man's possible by rebuking his faulty actual—it tells him, "You ought to have done better, *and you can!*"

But again, where we ourselves have been injured, and might be tempted to harbour vengeful feelings, there a true charity will "cover" the transgression from our own sight; we shall try not to think of it, to think instead of the better side of the wrongdoer, for surely he *has* a better side. You say that is difficult;

well, suppose it is—that is no reason for not attempting it; and when we do attempt it, believe me, we shall not find it impossible. Not that that—the ceasing from personal ill-will—is the end of the whole matter; but it is a good and indispensable beginning. *Not* the end, *but* the beginning—for without good-will, how are we to help anyone? But an enlightened good-will is not likely to stop there, with harbouring no resentment. It must ever aim at saving the offender, not from punishment, but from wrong itself, to win him back to goodness, though that may involve stern and thorough dealings, to commend to him the pursuit of whatsoever things are true, just, lovely, of good report, to place restoration before him as a possible ideal. The excellence of charity manifests itself, not in mere easy good-nature, but persists in seeking the highest good of the wayward, the erring, the fallen, helping them to rise and to find themselves once more. That can only be done by appealing to the best in human nature, and trusting to that best to assert itself, given encouragement and opportunity—yes, and taking the will into account as well as the deed, for the great thing, in the eyes of God at least, is surely not that we attain, but that we strive aright and earnestly.

This is the conclusion of the whole matter, as I see it, and commend it to you: the highest charity is redemptive in purpose and essence; and it "covers" transgression by supplying a new motive power, a new dynamic, which wins the transgressor to retrace his steps from the famine country of sin to the Father's house. Such an end can only be achieved by self-giving, and of that self-giving we have the perfect type and symbol in the Cross of Christ. Not as a substitute,

bearing our punishment, but as making the most moving, the most persuasive appeal to us, does Jesus surrender His life—for our sakes, not in our stead—in the grandest of all acts of self-sacrifice, in the crowning charity of Calvary. All through life, but supremely in laying it down, He manifests " that disposition which, despite human unworthiness and refusal, persists in its purpose to lift us to His own height and blessedness." May we listen to that call, and avail ourselves of what Christ offers to us. And may we pray for and strive to practise that " most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues," without which " all our doings are nothing worth."

X

THE LONELINESS OF LIFE

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy."—PROV. xiv. 10.

LET me begin this sermon by reminding you of one of the best-attested traits in the character of Jesus. All the Evangelists agree in telling us that He—the Son of Man who moved with such evident delight among the sons of men, mingling with them and sharing their experiences—showed His real humanity not only in His habitual free intercourse with His kind, but in the need He felt every now and again to get away from them, to escape from the touch and presence of the crowd, to be by Himself. There are numerous passages in the Gospels to that effect, but I draw your attention to two that are typical. "And after He had sent the multitudes away," Matthew tells us, "He went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, He was there alone." And in the Fourth Gospel we read, "Jesus, perceiving that they were about to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again into the mountain Himself alone." On the one occasion He craved the relief of quiet and solitude after over-much, over-close contact with His fellows, and retired literally to recover Himself; on the other, when the noisy populace would press upon Him an

unwelcome dignity against His will, He withdraws from their clamour into the innermost citadel of His inviolate self, across whose threshold none can follow Him. There was a great deal of loneliness in the life of Jesus, inevitably so, at all times; but occasionally He experienced an overmastering need to have loneliness around Him as well as within, and to re-invigorate His soul in the silence of wide and unfrequented spaces.

In satisfying this desire for solitude, Jesus, the most sympathetic and companionable of men, obeyed a wise and deep and true instinct, and one which we are in some danger of losing to-day. If He was able to identify Himself so completely with others, it was just because He kept a jealous guard over the portals of His individuality; He lived a rich life out of sight, with experiences no one could share with Him—but the *results* of those solitary experiences He gladly and readily shared with the world. And this brings me to the saying in the Book of Proverbs which suggested my subject and its title—"The Loneliness of Life"—to me; "The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy."

I

Those words strike an unexpected note, standing where they do, in the midst of reflections which deal chiefly with the outward side of life, with aspects and activities that are obvious to the eye. But this very unexpectedness is significant. In the midst of absorbing work, associations, interests, there comes to most of us at times quite suddenly the reminder—Why, all of this, which takes up so much room, and raises so

much sound, is only on the surface of our being; the larger part of ourselves is like the bulk of an iceberg, submerged; there is an inner, deeper life of ours, with emotions—cares and joys and sorrows—of which the outside world has, and can have, no knowledge, but which is just our own. The other day you read in the papers of a man dying in a foreign capital, known to his neighbours only for the extraordinary economies he practised; who would have thought that his whole dream and object in stinting himself of light and food and fuel was to leave a princely bequest to an orphanage? That is an extreme case, but it illustrates a very general fact: how little we know of the inner experiences of thought and feeling even of those with whom we associate day by day! How little we can guess of their impelling motives, their governing ideas, the make-up and structure of their inner world! Mysterious walls fend us off from our nearest; a gateless barrier divides personality from personality; we each inhabit, we each constitute, a separate universe.

I want to suggest that this loneliness is not only inevitable, but is designed by God for our good; and the first thing I would point out is that there are far too many influences at work to break in upon this solitude of the soul, and despoil it of one of the main conditions for its true growth and development. Wordsworth's complaint, "The world is too much with us," was never so well founded as in the present age; people live more and more in huge aggregates, in swarms from which there is no escaping; there is no rest from the besetting of humanity, from the life that is surging round us, pressing upon us. I am quite sure that there is something lost—something we cannot afford to lose—

in this gregariousness of modern life, this everlasting merging of our individual selves in a mass of other selves; we do not give the soul a chance to send down its roots, take in its proper nurture, reach its maturity of selfhood, in this lack of quiet and collection.

The process begins with our children. I am heartily in sympathy with many of the changes that mark the treatment of children in our own age, but are we not losing something all the same? Is there not rather too much movement, too little quiet, in the lives of growing boys and girls nowadays? Are we not making men and women of them prematurely? Is it not the fact that they are given more impressions than they can possibly assimilate, and is not a great deal of precocious brightness gained at the expense of inner depth? In a word, is there not some serious danger nowadays of sacrificing that development of the child's mind and character which proceeds best in the calm atmosphere of a home such as the older ones among us recall? Few influences, but those good and simple and steady; few distractions—much less in the way of amusement, probably, little that was calculated to assault the nerves or awaken the imagination of childhood before the time—yet I doubt whether those children were much less happy than ours, and I sometimes suspect that this quieter way of life, with its absence of rush and excitement, its greater simplicity and frugality, was better calculated to lay the foundations of future character, of a godly, righteous and sober life.

But the same tendency to merge and overlay and swamp individuality pervades the whole of our modern existence. More and more people every year are

penned and herded together in our vast cities, unable to get away from each other, to be by themselves, to take a breath which someone else may not overhear; there is a decay both of privacy and the desire for privacy—indeed, we are training up a population large strata of which cannot bear the idea of being alone, and that because they have no inner resources of feeling or thought; they have hardly separate existences, and cannot face solitude. A thoughtful writer the other day gave us rather a terrifying description of one of our city crowds on Bank Holiday—not merely the vapidity of their amusements, but their puny, ill-set-up physique, above all the insignificance of their features—features on which no individual emotion or reflection had set its stamp. "Compare them with an Afghan's face," he exclaimed; "it is like comparing a chicken with an eagle."

Now so far as our modern life tends to produce such results, to rub out the marks of separate selfhood, I cannot but think that civilisation has taken an unfortunate turn; our highest interests, our finest development, demand that we should respect what Tennyson called "This main miracle that thou art thou"—each soul a special word of God, with its own message to deliver, its own contribution to make, its own destiny to fulfil. And in spite of all the influences which would reduce men and women to mere cogs in a vast machinery of which they form part without controlling any part of it, deep down we know the truth about ourselves to be quite other; we have to face this loneliness of our own separate existence, yes, and to find it a means of grace in the formation of character. You remember when Helmer, in Ibsen's "Doll's House," says to Nora,

"Before everything else you're a wife and a mother"; and she replies to that sublime platitudinist, "Before everything else I'm a human being—just like you." It is exactly this truth, or the consciousness of it, which makes many people suspicious (I do not say whether rightly or wrongly) of Socialism: we do not want to have our conduct, our income, our leisure, our lives generally State-regulated, our initiative paralysed, our individuality blotted out and reduced to some general pattern chosen *for* us, not *by* us; we want to preserve our inner freedom and independence, to be ourselves, even if that means being a shade less perfect than any uniform standard imposed by authority would make us—and the instinct is essentially right, it is founded in the constitution of the soul itself. We are not meant to be self-sufficient; we reach out for the sympathy which makes life bearable; we rejoice in every manner of associations with our fellows, and would miss none of them; but in the last resort the soul stands and must stand alone. I said already that Christ's passion for an occasional spell of solitude was part of His real humanity; let me show that in this, as in all other things, He is our true Exemplar, and that what applies to Him applies to us also.

II

To begin with, I venture to say that this loneliness of life, so poignantly expressed by our text, is quite a common experience, which has its awe and its pathos, just like physical solitude, but also, like this, its consolation and its grandeur. To find ourselves quite alone in a physical sense, cut off from our kind, may indeed bring us a sense of forlornness, of helplessness,

according to the circumstances; but it does also at times bring a glorious sense of relief, of liberation, of exhilarating freedom. You have all at some time or other, I hope, set out on a long tramp with only your thoughts for company, and found the company none of the worst. I cannot speak of the joys of solitary climbs, but I have known the sensation of being far out in the dark water on dark nights all alone, with not a soul or a sail in sight, and the rather exultant feeling of having only my own strength to rely on, if I wanted to swim back to the distant shore. Well, now, it seems to me that life is a good deal like that—and meant to be. In all that concerns us most deeply, most intimately, we are in the last analysis thrown upon ourselves and our own resources. Up to a certain point—a very high point if you will—we are helped and guided, cheered and comforted, warned or pardoned by others; but beyond that point they will not, because they cannot, accompany us on our journey, nor can even their eyes follow us along the windings of that upward or downward way. In all great joys, in all great sorrows, there is an incommunicable element, something no one can share with us, something we cannot reveal to anyone, because it is absolutely personal to ourselves. The realisation of this truth may come to us while we move in the midst of a multitude —suddenly we are conscious that not one of all these knows whether or why we feel lifted up or cast down; but it is just as true that none even of our nearest understands us completely, and their very effort to do so adds at times a note of pathos to their inability to comprehend. Between soul and soul, unscaleable walls; in the fullest confidence, still something withheld,

because it cannot be expressed in terms that would convey a meaning to any but ourselves. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy. There are decisions, usually vital, which no one can take for us, and which we can very poorly explain or justify to others, issues on which we alone must judge, burdens of which no shoulders, however willing, can relieve us, sins no outside tribunal can effectively absolve us from—and when that fact comes sharply home to us, we are apt to feel overwhelmed by the knowledge *how* alone we are. I remember a phrase from a French book, where one of the personages, buffeted about by unfriendly fate, piteously exclaims, "*On n'a que soi*"—"One's only got oneself"—and we have all felt like that on occasion.

But this inevitable loneliness, this innermost isolation of which we grow specially conscious at times of crisis, is, like all other ordinances of God, not intended for our undoing or discouragement, but rather for our training and the making of character. It is a school of self-reliance, of self-respect, of self-realisation. I think on the whole most of us feel pleased rather than otherwise when someone set over us in authority says to us, "I want you to do this piece of work—you, and no one else, are capable of doing it." Is there not a thrill and an uplift about the thought that just you are regarded as fit to carry an undertaking through—is it not a tribute to your capacity? Who wants to do particularly what anybody else might do just as easily? Now that is how God treats us and deals with us; to each one his or her own task, which has to be executed without assistance—a task which no one can discharge in our stead: does it not grow honourable when we regard

it in that light? We have got to do this, to bear that, to refrain from the other, by ourselves, unaided, and it seems hard—often it is hard; but the object is the fashioning of something that will last, the making of manhood and womanhood, the growing of a self—and that is worth enduring some amount of hardness and setting ourselves with a will to the unshared enterprise. It is *that* by which we are going to be made, *that* by which we are going to be judged. Are you called upon to tread the winepress alone? Are you set to abide staunchly by principle against expediency, to fulfil some trying duty, to battle against difficulty, all unassisted and unregarded? But One regards you, my brother or sister, nor forgets; and the effort you put forth in your loneliness works for you a far more exceeding weight of glory, makes you worth so much more to God—may I not add, and to yourself. And in the end each man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it.

III

But I want to hark back, if I may, to this expression, "growing a self," because the moment we reflect, we can see that not only is this what we are here for, but it is what no one can do *for* us. There are many who shirk the labour, and many ways of shirking it; but if we would accomplish it, we must learn to be alone and to stand alone. So many people have no other ambition but to be passable copies of some wretched, fashionable model; they are anxious to get all the correct shibboleths off by heart, and have a profound distrust of originality. They possess no opinions on any subject under the sun—whether it be music, religion,

clothes, politics or what not—but the accepted opinions, those that have the legible and unmistakable hallmark of respectable orthodoxy. They are never found guilty of saying or doing unpopular things, because it has never struck them that their business—yours and mine—is to be themselves. They do not accept the loneliness of life—it terrifies them: none but the well-frequented paths for them—and verily, they have their reward! That is to say, they miss all the joy of intrepid thought, of courageous action, they know none of the exhilaration of standing alone for the right and the truth as they see it, of breaking a lance on behalf of a cause the world has not as yet taken under its patronage. Here is Dreyfus, the victim of a vast clerical and militarist conspiracy, found guilty of high treason, publicly degraded and sent to a living death on Devil's Island; and here is Zola, sacrificing popularity, income, everything, to raise his voice on behalf of this man whom he had never set eyes on. How easy it would have been to keep silence; how difficult to isolate oneself, to court ostracism, for the sake of justice—but what an inward triumph and satisfaction in so obeying the highest promptings and realising one's best self, even though it meant solitariness and persecution!

There has lately passed away in that whelming catastrophe in the Atlantic a man to whom above most others in this generation it was given cheerfully and ungrudgingly to make lonely stands for unpopular ideals—W. T. Stead. One often disagreed with him, but never without paying a tribute to his perfect sincerity, his total indifference to prudential calculations, or, more particularly, what the world would say

about him. He just wanted to be himself—whether lonely or lionised was a secondary consideration with him. And his readiness to be, if necessary, in a minority of one, was the more remarkable since he rejoiced more than most in the sense of fellowship, in the company of his kind. He faced obloquy, ridicule, poverty, as though these things meant nothing; to him they literally did mean nothing in comparison with other possessions which he valued more highly by far. Towards the end of his life, we are told, he abandoned a lucrative position on the press for conscientious reasons. "Can you afford to do this?" a friend asked him. "Well," he said, "you see, I have a very wealthy partner." "Who is he?" "God Almighty," was the reply. A man who really believed that could afford many things; he could afford, amongst the rest, to bear loneliness, for in all his stormy career he had the consciousness of an inner quiet which the noise and clamour of the world could not pierce or disturb. As Burns said,

> A correspondence fixed with Heaven
> Is sure a noble anchor.

The idealist, even when despised and rejected, has meat to eat which the world knows not of; and his joy no one taketh away.

IV

And this brings me to what is the most important aspect of our subject. We read how, when Jesus had sent away the multitudes, He went into the mountain apart to pray, and when even came, He was there alone. The multitudes meant well enough, they were noisy and demonstrative and enthusiastic, and Jesus had done

His best by them and deserved their enthusiasm, but He felt the imperative necessity to get away from them, to escape from the plain into the mountain, to bathe and refresh His tired soul in solitude, in contact with nature and with God. Friends, there is a solitude, a detachment from mankind which does not by any means spring from an inhuman want of sympathy, but which we must learn to cultivate, to be able to enter into at will, in order that we may know the Divine companionship. We reach our best, and are our best, in communion with the Unseen, in surrendering ourselves to His action upon our spirits, and for that experience we need seasons of quiet when we shut out the outer world, so that the inner life may have freedom to manifest and exercise itself. It is the uniform experience of the great souls of the race that in those seasons, withdrawn from the things of sense, with human society excluded, they gained a strength and an insight which did not come to them otherwise. The heart which knows its own grief, but can make no fellow-mortal understand—which experiences its own joy, but can make no stranger share the experience—finds a perfect understanding of all its needs, its moods, its very beats, with God. And the ultimate object of the loneliness of life is to drive us back upon Him, apart from whom we can know no rest. We have to be alone—really alone, as we seldom allow ourselves to be—in order to feel the stillness athrob with the presence of God.

Friends, in these last days through which we have been passing,* the thoughts of the most heedless have

* This sermon was preached shortly after the sinking of the *Titanic*.

of necessity turned to the brevity, the uncertainty, of this swift and solemn trust of life. Before us all, far or close at hand, there looms through the mists of the future a last loneliness, when the world and its myriad interests and activities ebb away from us, leaving the soul solitary indeed, on the threshold of eternity. It were well for us to learn in this passing life to fill our moments of solitude with the sense of our Father's nearness; so shall we face that final scene without dismay, conscious that the Everlasting Love is nigh, and that around us are the everlasting arms. May it be ours to say, when the spirit is about to set forth on its seeming-lonely voyage—"And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

XI

THE GRACE OF HUMILITY

"Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility."—PROV. xviii. 12.

THOUSANDS of years ago, as a nomad tribe was wandering across the Babylonian plain, they beheld with amazement the ruins of a mighty building which even in its decay dominated the monotony of the landscape, and seemed to rear itself into the sky like an ineffectual threat, a frustrated defiance. That this gigantic edifice was a temple-tower built in the dim past and abandoned for some generations, the wanderers could not know; but as they camped in the vicinity of the huge mass of masonry that night their fancy began to play and weave a story round it: in the grey ages of the world's beginning, they said, the inhabitants of the earth, grown reckless and impious, had raised this monstrous pile in order to lay siege to heaven itself; but on the eve of success their design was turned to nought, their headlong ambition ended in failure, and the unfinished tower stood to that day and for ever, a monument of that pride which comes before a fall, a warning to the overweening conceit of man.

This idea, which we find in the Old Testament legend, is deep-seated in the human mind. The Greeks had their corresponding tale of the giants and Titans piling

mountain upon mountain, Pelion upon Ossa, to reach and conquer the heavenly heights, of their being hurled back by Zeus with his swift thunderbolts, and then cast as prisoners into the underworld; indeed, Greek sentiment consistently warned man against bearing himself too loftily, lest he should excite the Divine ill-will—they feared unbroken good fortune, as sure to arouse the envy of the gods and bring calamity and woes in its train. When success smiled too persistently upon a mortal, then was the time for him to ward off the vengeance of the heavens by large voluntary sacrifices, and so to buy himself off from supernatural punishment.

Of course, neither Jewish nor Christian thought countenances the notion of God grudging us happiness or plenty, or desiring to punish us for the mere fact of being successful; for us this whole question is answered fully and finally in our Saviour's words: "If *ye* then desire to give good gifts unto your children, how much more your Father which is in heaven!" Nevertheless, the feeling of the sinfulness of pride, the duty of humbleness, goes right through our religion, alike in the Old and the New Testament: "to walk humbly with thy God" is one of the three requirements laid on man by the Lord; "he that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," proclaims the Gospel; and the same note is sounded again and again in the Book of Proverbs: "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty," we read, "and before honour goeth humility"; and again, "A man's pride shall bring him low: but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honour."

Now the first thing which it occurs to me to say in connection with this subject is to utter a warning against the pitfalls of unreality which beset it. I am afraid that what I said in an earlier sermon about charity applies equally to humility: the word is one which has lost caste, it has gathered around it associations that do not appeal to us. The prevalence of imitations has made us suspicious of the genuine thing. The hat-touching, curtseying humbleness which fawns and cringes for favours is the ugly product and counterpart of the kind of charity which bestows doles and saps the independence of those who receive them. There is a cant of humility which is positively odious, because it is utterly insincere, a mere cloak which hides cunning and self-seeking. The genius of Dickens portrayed that loathsome type, smirking, shifty, treacherous, once for all in Uriah Heap. Who has not had experience of the soft-spoken, deferential, self-effacing individual, who merely masks and disguises by those means his real disposition, and is all the while serving his own ends? What diffidence, what lowliness some people will display when there is anything to be made out of it! And again, how others will humbly decline to put themselves forward, when it would mean doing some extra work, or placing themselves in the fighting line! The wonderful modesty and self-distrusting shyness which keeps men tongue-tied rather than give utterance to unpopular, heretical, unfashionable opinions—the humility, in a word, which is the excuse of the shirker, the coward, the man who wants to be friends with both sides, but chiefly with the side that has the loaves and fishes to distribute! We know it all, and we instinctively despise and recoil from it.

And then again—for we may as well take stock of these shams, and nail them to the counter—there is the affected self-depreciation which is only an indirect way, and a very annoying one, of challenging an admiring tribute. Let me use an illustration which always rises to my mind in this connection. You go to the wonderful islands on Lake Maggiore, owned by the Borromean family; you survey the gardens with all their varied and beautiful growths, go over the ducal palace where everything bespeaks vast riches, and finally, as you stand on the topmost garden terrace, overlooking this glorious picture set in an azure frame of shimmering water, almost overwhelmed by so much splendour and loveliness, you note the stone-carved family motto of the owners—the one word HUMILITAS—and the pretence strikes you as so grotesque as to be not altogether decent. You remember the lines of Coleridge—and how well they fit the occasion :—

> A "cottage" of gentility;
> And the Devil did grin, for his darling sin
> Is pride that apes humility.

But, further, it has to be confessed, I think, that in religion particularly there has been far too much of this unreality of language and sentiment, with the result that honest and healthy people have been driven into revolt. Let me explain. It is not natural for average men and women—by no means angels or saints, but trying on the whole to live reputable lives—to profess themselves Sunday by Sunday "miserable offenders," or to speak of the filthy rags of their righteousness, or of themselves as worms; they do not mean it, and they would be highly incensed if their

neighbours took their language seriously—how then can they expect God to take it seriously? Do we think we can cajole Him, or deceive Him, or propitiate Him, by the use of such self-degrading phrases? Let us shun unreality in all our relationships; but let us shun religious unreality as the very pestilence, for if we strike false notes here, the whole music of our lives will be inevitably falsified. The man who habitually crawls to his Maker will in too many instances habitually ride roughshod over his dependents, deal harshly with his employees, be an overbearing despot and bully; and the crawl and the harshness explain each other. I leave that statement there; every business man will bear me out.

But now that we are done with the shams and counterfeits, I am afraid we must own that humility at its best is apt to strike the modern man or woman as rather a negative attribute—what Milton called a fugitive and cloistered virtue. We would rather have something to be proud of than to be humble about; we would rather do and dare, and fight our way, than be everlastingly making excuses for ourselves. Let humility, we say in our hearts, be the attitude and the apology of those who have done nothing with their lives, or even of the feebly and ineffectually good; but for ourselves, we would rather take Browning's strenuous lines for our motto:—

> Let a man contend to the uttermost,
> For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

It is not by being self-distrustful and apologetic that men have overcome difficulties without and within, enlarged their powers, subjugated the forces of nature,

established their dominion, or developed their character. If we would not be left behind in the race, we must believe in ourselves, insist on ourselves, assert ourselves; and we distrust humility as the synonym of inefficiency and the prelude of failure—failure which renders no service to God or man, but in the counting up means only so much waste.

In all this, I confess, there is an element of truth; but we may be very sure that it is not *this* kind of humility that either the Old Testament or the New advocates and enjoins. On the one hand, the race which has gathered up its maxims of life in the Book of Proverbs has always had an abundant share of vitality and energy, it has fought for success and attained success along every variety of road; and again, Jesus, who spoke of Himself as meek and lowly, and who commended the humble, flashed forth the quality of His mind in the bold assertion, "Ye have heard that it was said unto them of old . . . but *I* say unto you"; He showed it in His whole uncompromising attitude towards the Law, and in driving the money-changers forth from the Temple. What, then, we ask ourselves again, is the humility we are asked to cultivate as a grace of character?

Well, in the first place, I need hardly point out that, however much we may talk of the necessity of self-confidence for success, it is still a fact borne out by everyday experience that pride goeth before a fall, and that before destruction the heart of man is haughty. It is one of the commonest forms of insanity which culminates in a man's delusions that he is the Emperor of the world, or has amassed fabulous riches, or made some gigantic invention which places undreamt-of

power in his hands. Every asylum has among its inmates some of these unhappy victims of self-conceit; and even short of actual madness, sheer, o'ertoppling pride is the secret of many disasters. A Napoleon fills the world with his fame, subdues monarchs and nations, alters the map of Europe in a few tumultuous years, till he really believes that there is nothing impossible for him—and then he carries his ambition to a frozen grave in Russia, and closes his meteoric career, an exile, at the age of forty-six. And how many Napoleons of finance have in their own sphere repeated the fate of the Corsican! Pride, the exaltation of the ego, blinds its victims to the nature and force of the obstacles they set themselves to conquer, it dulls their moral sense, and so invites retribution; it seeks to overleap the boundaries of the humanly feasible, fatally over-estimates its powers, and so comes to inevitable grief. In all that ghastly tragedy of the *Titanic* which haunts, and will continue to haunt, our imaginations, I see above all else the stern verdict of the Nature of Things upon overweening human pride. Pride of engineering skill, which confidently proclaimed the unsinkableness of a vessel—the hugest ever built—which on its first voyage sank from human sight after an impact with ice so seemingly slight that it did not disturb a card-party in progress; pride of unlimited wealth seeking expression in an unheard-of sumptuousness of equipment, which took the place of proper life-saving precautions on board; pride which exhibits itself in a blind trust in material and appliances, seen too late to have been ill-founded. "In reading the reports," says Mr. Joseph Conrad, a writer of many years' experience of mercantile shipping,

" the first reflection which occurs to one is that if that luckless ship had been a couple of hundred feet shorter she would have probably gone clear of the danger. But then, perhaps," he adds with grim sarcasm, " she could not have had a swimming bath and a French cafe." Pride, finally, which in the result, though not in intention, sacrificed the lives of the poor to the luxuries of the rich. If ever we have had a terrific and soul-shaking admonition to humility, we have had it in the catastrophe of the ill-fated *Titanic*. We shall cease our worship of bigness and bulk and bullion for a time, as we reflect how little power there is in these idols to save : " for in one hour so great riches is made desolate."

But in the second place, and looking at our subject in its personal aspects, I would submit to you, that humility is the temper of all who are conscious of their dependence, of their limitations, of their defects. When we remember our infirmities of will and character, when once we call to mind our powerlessness against forces none of which we can control, we shall have little inclination left for boastfulness. There is of course no such insufferable person as the man who is under the delusion that he is self-made—I am glad to think the type is dying out, though at one time he was a great and rather noisy nuisance ; but as a matter of fact, a little reflection brings it home to us how little power even the most powerful has apart from the services, the good-will, the good opinion of his fellows. Capital always talks as though it was the beneficient provision of Heaven, but for which labour would go without its daily bread—I read an address in that key only quite a short while ago—whereas capital could not have

been produced at all apart from labour, and is quite powerless, dull and inert, without labour's help.

So, then, the only wise attitude for each one of us towards our fellows is the humble one—quite remote from cringing—which readily acknowledges its dependence and its sense of countless benefits received at their hands; the attitude, too, of willing eagerness to serve in turn, to make some sort of contribution toward that store of the world's commodities which is ever in process of being consumed, and which has to be constantly renewed to supply the world's necessities. Humility says, "So much have I received," and in the same breath asks, "And now, what can I give?" To make our service good enough—nay, to make ourselves good enough to serve, fit to render help, to seek to increase our efficiency from a sense of obligation—that is the only becoming spirit, and in order that it may be ours, we must fight down the pride which wishes to be ministered unto rather than to minister.

And then it seems to me that a measure of humility—discontent with self and its performances—is indispensable to all progress, whether personal or social. Self-satisfied civilisations are stagnant civilisations—self-satisfied people are unprogressive people. Show me a man who is persuaded that he does his particular job just well enough—a workman who thinks he is a good enough workman, a musician who thinks he is just about a sufficiently accomplished singer or player, a preacher who fancies he has nothing more to learn about preaching—and I will show you every time a man from whom nothing further may be hoped in the future, who will go back automatically through not attempting to move forward. As humility is the

grace which alone makes the successful tolerable, so it is the condition of all advance. And it is not the wisest or the most proficient who are satisfied with themselves; a Paul, toward the very close of his phenomenal career, writes from his Roman prison to the Philippians: "Not that I have already attained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend." I shall always remember seeing a letter written by Dr. Martineau, when that illustrious thinker was past ninety, in which he spoke with utter simplicity of returning from his Highland holiday to London "for much-needed study." Such men are great enough to be humble.

And all this applies with doubled and trebled force to our moral attainments, or rather to that sense of our moral deficiencies which can never be very far from those who deal honestly with themselves. As I said earlier in the sermon, we are not called upon at every turn to express contrition, to speak of ourselves as worms or as miserable offenders; and yet, how far have we fallen short, one and all, of what we perfectly well know to be right, nay, of what we can by no stretch of imagination describe as outside our reach! You and I, brethren, could have been better, done better, and there is no getting away from it. I do not know of any failing upon which Jesus was so severe as upon self-righteousness—He dealt with it in far more unsparing terms than with the common frailties of humanity, because He saw that this sin went so much deeper. "One might imagine," a would-be critic of Christ's once said, "to read the strictures of Jesus on the Pharisees, that these men were the lowest of the low—which they were *not*." Well, the Master ranked

them beneath those reputed lowest. He said that poor lost things from the street would enter into the Kingdom before the respectable Pharisees and Scribes. They were satisfied with the level on which they stood, consciously superior to ordinary poor sinners, and the sense of their meritoriousness and correctitude destroyed in them all generosity, all compassion, all love. They seriously fancied that they somehow placed God under an obligation—made Heaven their debtor—by keeping the Law so zealously; and because all their doing ministered only to their pride, it was nothing worth—of immeasurably less account in God's sight than the humble self-abasement of the publican.

There is a mediæval story concerning the Devil, which always strikes me as full of insight, just because it gives quite a different picture of the Prince of Darkness from the one usually presented. The Devil, meeting a certain saint, tried his utmost to overcome him both by guile and force, but failed abjectly in his enterprise, and in the end owned himself beaten. "Why is it, think you," said he to the saint, "that I could not prevail over you? You fancy it is because you abstain from all delights of sense—but I am much more abstemious than you. You think it is because you are deeply versed in the Scriptures—but I, the Devil, know them by heart. Your fastings and vigils are nothing to mine, but I could not subdue you because your humility was with you—and I, being the Devil, have no humility." I think I may leave the story to be its own comment and convey its own lesson.

Lastly, as we should feel humble in the knowledge of our weakness, our dependence on others, our secret

faults and presumptuous sins, so above all should we strive to realise what the ancient prophet means by "walking humbly with our God." Not to lie prostrate, not to grovel, with our foreheads touching the dust, but to *walk humbly*—a very different thing. By humility towards God is meant the attitude of unreserved trust, of childlike teachableness, of ready obedience—all that was in the mind of our Lord when He made little children the very type and pattern of those who would receive the Kingdom—all that He Himself exhibited in unique perfection. Quiet confidence in the Divine leading; quiet receptiveness of the Divine truth; quiet submission to the Divine command—those who have tried the method have found it make for happiness and a peace such as is not of the world's giving. It is true that the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, who dwells in the high and holy place, dwelleth also with him that is of an humble spirit. It is true that when we take our orders from Him who has spoken to us through His Son, our spirits find rest and gladness in the knowledge that we are doing His will. It is true that when we feel sorely perplexed and unable to disentangle the coil of pain and disappointment, the conviction that He holds the threads of our destinies in His wise hand will allay the soreness and come as a cool and healing breath upon our fevered impatience.

And as spiritual humility is the condition of all spiritual advancement, so it is the source and mainspring of intrepid strength: what made the Puritans utterly fearless of men was their consciousness that they had yielded themselves implicitly as instruments to be employed as the Most High might choose; what made Jesus strong and brave in the face of danger and death

was His complete acceptance of His Father's will as absolutely best. Here is the secret of power—and like all great secrets, it is an open one. We, too, can be brave and strong and more than conquerors if we will learn from Him who humbled Himself, and whom God has exalted ; and who, having been made perfect by obedience, has become unto all who obey Him the Author of eternal salvation.

XII

THE CURSE OF MEANNESS

"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth."—PROV. xiii. 7.

LET me begin what I have to say this morning by drawing your attention to that incident in the closing days of our Lord, which we have once more read together—that story of the woman with the cruse of ointment, who made such an unexpected appearance in the house of Simon when Jesus was a guest there. Of all the company in that room only One understood and appreciated the significance of her act; the rest, even the Master's own disciples, viewed it with disapproval as a piece of senseless extravagance, foolish and reprehensible. "Waste," they called it, and wondered that Jesus countenanced such recklessness; why could not the woman have sold the precious perfume, given the proceeds to them, and let them use it in charity? But Jesus, though His mind was already filled with sad forebodings, had not lost that keen intelligence which gave Him His unique insight into human motives. He knew what was in man; He knew that the disciples were merely annoyed at the woman's superb prodigality, which their petty souls could not understand; their concern for the poor, and the charit-

able use to which the price of the perfume might have been devoted, was only an afterthought—they would have liked, no doubt, to have the handling and hoarding of this considerable sum, but their complaint and censure sprang, not from philanthropy but from meanness, and with meanness Jesus had no patience. It is a fitting foot-note and comment upon the whole episode that Judas went away—apparently straight from Simon's house—to interview the priests, and offered to betray his Lord for money. If Jesus did not value that commodity, he, Judas, did.

Jesus was the son of poor people ; He had grown up in a household where there could never be more than just enough to satisfy very simple wants, and He Himself had worked at the bench for a livelihood until the last year of His life ; but He was as far from over-estimating as from under-estimating material wealth. He was, indeed, abundantly alive to the danger of great possessions ; He saw their power to draw the soul away from the things of the spirit, to bind it in fetters none the less heavy because they were golden ; He could not but have noted many an instance of uncontrolled riches furnishing the means to ruinous indulgence, and the degradation of self and others. But the real enemy, he discerned, was not wealth as such, but covetousness, avarice, a grasping disposition—not the having of money, but the idolatry of Mammon. Against this He never tired of directing His warning and rebuke—and it is significant that this part of His teaching should have provoked the particular derision of the Pharisees, because they " were lovers of money." I venture to suggest that it must have been a special disappointment to Jesus to find at the very close of

His career that His own intimate followers manifested this spirit of meanness.

And now turn again to the book which we are studying in these sermons—those "Words of the Wise" and their almost inexhaustible treasures of counsel, reflection and suggestion. What makes this Book so valuable is the fact that its piety is never open to the suspicion of other-worldliness, it never makes the ordinary man impatient—as I am afraid a good deal of well-intentioned devotional literature does—by ignoring the facts of every day. It does not deal with mysteries or abstractions, but with a concrete world and the concrete people who move in it. We do not feel tempted to say, as we read these pages, "Ah, well, all this does not refer to us," because we know that it refers very much to us. You may remember that when we were dealing with "The Worth of Wealth," I pointed out that these ancient sages make no pretence of despising that security from want which an adequate income confers, nor do they sing the praises of poverty —praises which we, frankly, do not mean, and which to our ears always savour of unreality. These writers are the spokesmen of a race which, above most others, has shown conspicuous talents in all that pertains to money-making—a race which, it is true, contains to this day an enormous percentage of the very poor, but which has never glorified poverty. Now, it is a most remarkable fact that in their collection of proverbial wisdom, together with a solid appreciation of solid possessions, we should also come upon warning after warning against an excessive devotion to riches, either as regards their acquisition or their hoarding. "Weary not thyself to be rich," the reader is exhorted, and the

warning comes home, for have we not all known men with whom the amassing of wealth had become quite a purposeless, wearying and rather unintelligent routine, which they continued to follow without being able to explain to a living soul—or to themselves, for the matter of that—what particular satisfaction they derived from it? One can understand a man toiling terribly in order to escape from want or the danger of want, in order to provide those dependent on his efforts with comfort, a good education, a favourable start in life; one can also understand his desire for such means as will enable him to indulge in certain hobbies, to gratify this or that taste—travel or study, and the like—but beyond that? Why still go on with the same feverish intentness on profits as if any relaxation, any looking to right or left, were bound to spell ruin and disaster?

So this practical book for practical people has nothing but contempt for the money-grubber who "coveteth greedily all the day long," and misses so much that would give him a taste of real happiness. "There is that scattereth and increaseth yet more; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want," is one observation; and another, even keener, goes to the heart of the matter by saying, "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth." All honour to the industry, will-power, self-command and perseverance which enable a man to climb the steep ladder of honest success; but for the spectacle of an immortal spirit enslaved by the desire for mere having, mere accumulation, it is impossible to feel anything but a strong distaste. On

the sin of meanness the Book of Proverbs is specially, and deservedly, severe.

Let us look at this subject of the use of money with a little care, for it is here that we discover one of the surest touchstones of character. With great shrewdness Mr. Gladstone once observed, "When you know what a man does with money—how he gets it, keeps it, spends it, and thinks about it—you know some of the most important things about him." Once more, then—it is natural and inevitable that we should seek to acquire what is so indispensable for the satisfaction of our wants; there is no need to be squeamish or apologetic for striving to obtain results which, in nearly every case, are reckoned in money terms—no need to affect contempt for that which puts us in possession of the things we want. As a friend of mine put it in conversation the other day, "To work hard to earn money which will purchase bread—bread that will feed the mouths one loves—that is worth while, and makes life worth while." Yes, and I would add that to increase one's earning power so as to be able to raise the lives of such a small circle to a level of material and intellectual well-being, to bring, say, good health, good books, good music and the rest within their reach, is an entirely honourable ambition, which has ever been the inspiration of much honest and excellent work. And let me say here in passing—it is so easy for those who are already not unprosperous to express their astonishment at some group or grade of workers standing out for another sixpence a day: "so sordid, so material of them," is the criticism one hears made—"these wretched people think of nothing but their

bread-and-butter!" Well, if some of these critics had not quite enough bread, to say nothing of butter, it might help to correct their standpoint and to sober their social philosophy. I have myself heard of a very rich man expressing his wonderment and disgust because someone else was influenced in the acceptance of a post by a mere difference of a pound a week; but then he had no notion of how great a difference that was to the one he condemned as mercenary. There is nothing to be ashamed of, I repeat, in the honest effort most men make to add to their earning for the purpose of legitimate spending. To have more leisure for the cultivation of one's mind, or for throwing oneself into some fresh movement or interest; to live, if you will, in healthier surroundings, with better air to breathe, with more beauty to gladden the eyes; yes, for the matter of that, to furnish one's dwelling harmoniously, to dress or enable other people to dress tastefully—these are quite blameless aspirations in themselves, but they all require money for their fulfilment. God hath made everything beautiful in its time, we read, and we certainly are meant to enjoy and appreciate all that is fair in nature and art, in colour and sound, and to cultivate our capacity of appreciation.

And this brings us to the sin, or the curse, of meanness. The honourable toil and effort of earning becomes unspeakably vulgarised and even preposterous when its main purpose is mere accumulation for accumulation's sake; and not for nothing has this temper always excited popular scorn and contempt. We lose our sympathy with Shylock when he names his ducats before his daughter. To value wealth for its purchasing power is sane and sensible enough; to value it for its own sake

and keep it locked up—to hate the spending and exult in the having—is about as rational as to keep, say, a priceless violin under lock and key, not allowing it to be played on. Money is an instrument of immense power and possibilities; but an instrument which does not act is an ineptitude, and its possessor a pathetic sight. Yes, precisely because money can accomplish so much, are we responsible to God and man for its use, and its *dis*use, its mere miserly hoarding, is no more to be excused than its *mis*use, while of the two the former is often the less intelligent. We have to get rid of the last remnant of the fancy that we may do precisely as we will with our own, for the simple reason that we ourselves are not our own. The sin of meanness lies in the denial that we are God's stewards, accountable to Him for what we do or leave undone with what He lends us; its curse is the double one, which takes effect in those who are guilty of this failing and those who have the misfortune of being affected by the niggardliness of others.

But before I come to deal with this latter point I would observe that a good deal of parsimony of the worse kind always strikes one as due to lack of imagination as much as anything. I spoke already of the type, all too well known, which goes on quite aimlessly and mechanically, though with concentrated energy, making money for dear life, intent on increased gains, increased dividends, without being able to extract one whit more real enjoyment from the result of all this frantic effort. To the office, or the shop, or the mill, and back again at night; mental interests, none; public interests, none; spiritual interests, none—a fact quite compatible with perfunctory Church attendance; very little amusement, save of the more elementary sort; neither

beauty nor grace in the general manner of living. What does this kind of man get out of all his pursuit of money he has not the wit to use? In what respect is he better off than someone with one-tenth his income? I can understand anyone prostrating himself before some entrancing idol; but Mammon, if the truth must be told, is such a desperately dull devil to worship—and its worshippers are such dullards, too! The fact is, they have never learnt how to spend—they lack the knowledge or taste what to spend *on*, and so they go on confusing means with ends.

Means with ends—exactly; for what do we seek to express when we speak of a man of *means?* Surely, that his possessions are only tools with which to fashion a life which shall be worth living, not an end in themselves; and what is the good of unused tools that gather rust, and only proclaim how much might have been done with them had their owner but seen how to make them fulfil their function? People have no outlet for their money because they have no *in*lets into their minds, and so they go on leading cheerless and dingy lives for which they themselves are no better, and for which their heirs are often the worse. And let me say this—that, deplorable as extravagance and recklessness are, popular feeling is not altogether at fault if it sees in the prodigal a charm which it fails to detect in the miser; both extremes are bad, no doubt, but we know which is the more sordid and unlovable of the two. Yes, and often the spendthrift and scapegrace is the direct result of, or reaction from, the niggardly temper of some elder which laid its shackles and restraints upon his years of growth.

But be the cause of such a disposition what it may,

its effect, its curse, is always the same and unescapable. Let us look the fact in the face; the Scripture is right when it speaks of "covetousness, which is idolatry," and no one can with impunity put anything in the place of God. No one who, in the language of the Book of Proverbs, "coveteth greedily all the day long," can escape deterioration all along the line; he must grow away from religion, for God Himself is the Great Giver, and how can one whose whole mind is set upon getting and keeping feel other than out of touch with that Divine Love which gave even its own Self for us men? And as this vice cuts its victim off from communion with God, so it separates him from sympathy with his fellow-men, it isolates him, sets him apart. In his most developed state the miser is a hermit, shunning men and shunned by them, alone with his obsession. And the result is that though he maketh himself rich, he yet hath nothing, and though he withholdeth, yet it tendeth only to poverty, a poverty deeper than all material privation, leaving him something less than a man.

You will say that these are rare cases; so they are, but the disease is one that attacks the most diverse grades in varying measures of severity, and once contracted is seldom shaken off. You have heard of converted drunkards, gamblers, evil-livers brought under conviction of sin and living new lives to the glory of God; but when have we heard of some hard, dour, grasping individual making his way to the penitent form, professing a change of heart and thenceforward practising generosity? Not that such a moral miracle is impossible with God; but the fact that such cases are rare in the records of conversion is eloquent and full

of warning. This, I say, is an infection the very first symptom of which should be fought most strenuously, for it is one which ravages and corrodes the very tissue of the soul. Let me give an illustration from life. Here is a tired workman making his way home after a day's toil; he passes a toy-shop, and something he sees in the window strikes him; his lean purse can ill afford the luxury, but it is for a child at home, and so he enters the shop to buy. But the owner has shrewdly taken the measure of the man—he wants this particular thing and won't haggle—and so the other deliberately asks and obtains a higher price. Now it is not the extra threepence or sixpence; but the person who was capable of coining that threepence or sixpence out of a poorer man's love for his child, might be more truly designated a son of perdition than many a criminal expiating some rash deed by years of penal servitude. And —to exemplify the same taint on a larger scale—do we not remember the extraordinary outbreak of meanness which followed the Budget of 1909, when Peers and landowners joyfully took the opportunity of reducing their subscriptions, withdrawing their grants to pensioners, etc., because they could not—so they said—bear the burden that measure laid upon their shoulders? Is it or is it not a fact that there are great firms of manufacturers to-day threatening to withdraw their support from medical charities in revenge for the Insurance Act? These are depths which one would rather not contemplate; but they show with what virulence the microbe of meanness attacks those who are not on their guard against it. And—to turn in yet another direction—what is it but the same evil proclivity, the determination to extract the uttermost farthing of profit, that

accounts for the horrible system of "living-in" which prevails in so many of the large retail establishments of this country, a system fraught with the worst dangers to the bodies and souls of those whom it engulfs and imprisons? Mean profits squeezed out of insufficient and ill-prepared food, served in stuffy underground rooms; out of overcrowded dormitories, the conditions in which are sometimes indescribable; out of a multitude of petty fines deducted from the scanty wages of this defenceless class; and public opinion even yet insufficiently alive to these abominations which should be ended—not mended—by law.

Listen. We are always insisting, and rightly insisting, on the optimism of Browning. It is a remarkable circumstance that the one poem in which that optimism falters is one founded on fact, and describing a victim of avarice, a girl who had lived and died in the odour of sanctity, while all the time she indulged her passion of covetousness—indulged it even beyond the portals of death, for she managed to secrete thirty gold coins in her golden hair, and there, years after, they were discovered when it was necessary to move the remains.

> Truth is truth: too true it was.
> Gold! She hoarded and hugged it first,
> Longed for it, leaned o'er it, loved it, alas,
> Till the humour grew to a head and burst.
>
> With heaven's gold gates about to ope,
> With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,
> An instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope
> For gold, the true sort—"Gold in heaven if you will,
> But I keep earth's too, I hope!"

We need not follow the poet in declaring that such a case proves the old doctrine of "original sin, the

corruption of man's heart" ; but we may well admit that from this quarter, more than from most others, does real corruption threaten human nature.

But we must not content ourselves with denouncing a snare ; we must also try to point out a more excellent way, and this I will do in the fewest words. Let us bear in mind that there are things purchasable by money—wholly or partially—but ever so much better than money. We all know that health and happiness for the individual and the community may be almost indefinitely increased by wiser methods of administering and expending the enormous wealth that actually exists. With a saner spirit prevailing, we could have our city beautiful, healthy, clean—a city to be proud of. And it is just as true for the individual that by making himself apparently poor—by spending instead of hoarding—he may have great wealth, the reward and satisfaction of seeing his money do something to increase the sum of good, combat and lessen the forces of evil, assist some cause in which he believes and which would help the world forward and upward. That should be a great and really noble incentive to earning money—to have it to devote to the progress of mankind, to promote that progress economically, socially, spiritually ; in a word to go into partnership with God. And that partnership, let us remember, involves a real sharing in God's own joy ; for when our Lord spoke of the greater blessedness of giving, He only revealed one of those open secrets anyone may discover for himself.

And secondly, there are things *un*purchasable by money, which, alas, men have again and again bartered away for gold, but always to their own impoverishment and undoing—inward peace, a pure conscience, the

sense of accord with the will of God, the goodwill and affection of our fellows, joy in the Holy Spirit. These are the possessions which we cannot afford to be without, and the money was never coined that can compensate us for their loss. We shall never forfeit them by liberality—we shall never gain them by its opposite.

Lastly, there are things abiding and perdurable which alone will avail either rich or poor, when all our material possessions fall away from us, as at the last they must; "for riches are not for ever," says the old writer, "and doth the crown endure unto all generations?" We must store up enduring riches in our minds and hearts and souls—gentle thoughts and unselfish aspirations, and the memory of kindly deeds—if we would have treasure in heaven; armed and equipped with such incorruptible wealth, we may await the great Beyond without disquiet, and when its portals open find ourselves not strangers in a strange land, but children called to their long-sought and promised home.

XIII

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD

" The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."—PROV. xx. 27.

WHEN I chose my subject and set it down for to-day, I did not realise that it might have a special appropriateness to the occasion, but so it has turned out. For to-day is Whit Sunday, the Festival of the Holy Spirit, when the Christian Church celebrates the giving of the Spirit to the early believers in Jerusalem ; and my subject is part of a sentence from the twentieth chapter of Proverbs, where we read that the spirit of man is the candle, or the lamp, of the Lord. That is a striking phrase, full of suggestions at some of which we shall glance presently ; but the first thought it calls to mind is that which we find so often and in so many forms expressed in our Scriptures—namely that man is somehow akin to God Himself. If the human spirit is as it were a spark which shows forth something of the Father of spirits, then God and man must be of the same substance, and that fact is infinitely full of hope and encouragement.

On that hope and encouragement I would chiefly insist this morning ; for somehow man has always been peculiarly fond of thinking meanly of himself and of human nature. In fact, the very term " human nature " has come to sound rather apologetic, as though

it meant some poor, frail material from which too much must not be expected. Why it should be so, I cannot tell, but you may remember that in an earlier sermon on the Grace of Humility, I pointed out that religion has often very mistakenly encouraged this spirit of exaggerated self-abasement. It is all very well to insist that we are to walk humbly with our God, but—once more—to walk humbly is one thing, and to crawl abjectly is another. We do not compliment our Maker when we whine about there being no health in us; there is really neither piety nor reason in the statement by one of our own leading theologians who declared the other day, quite in the style of the old Calvinism, that before God we have nothing save an equality of perdition. I say again, it is not complimentary to God to talk in such a style about His creatures; it is to charge Him with having created a miserable race of moral cripples and paralytics, and that He either could not, or would not, do better. Now what should we think of a human craftsman turning out such wretched handiwork? We should call him a bungler, a spoiler of good material. And if the whole human race is such a ghastly failure as Calvinism tells us, would not that be a direct reflection upon its Maker? We decline to believe such a libel upon God or man.

But then we are told that if we are not totally depraved and utterly wicked, we are at any rate utterly insignificant in the vast scheme of things, and cannot possibly matter in the sight of God—which is like saying that if we are not "lost" in one way, we are "lost" in another. In the immense universe revealed by modern astronomy we are simply negligible, of as

Now, in the first place let us dispose of the foolish fiction which would assign to man no pre-eminence over the animal creation. It is well-nigh inconceivable how people of intelligence and education could ever have persuaded themselves of so preposterous an absurdity, except on the ground that for some reason they must have wished to believe it. Granted that in the unimaginably far-off past man evolved from a sub-human stage, and granted that in a variety of ways we still show our animal ancestry in unmistakable fashion, yet the distinctions are so overwhelmingly larger than the resemblances that only sheer perversity could overlook them. To begin with externals, there is more fundamental likeness between the skulls of the highest European and the lowest savage than between those of the lowest savage and the highest anthropoid ape. The upright walk, again, and the distinctive use of hands and feet, all proclaim the immense advance man has made from his brute predecessors. But above all, the gift of articulate speech, whenever and howsoever acquired, marks a broad and deep gap between man and all the rest of creation. As has been well said, "there is something amazing, almost miraculous, in two persons speaking together—the thought descending out of the mind of the first into words, and going across on an airy bridge of sound to the other, then ascending again out of the word into the mind of the second. If an animal could talk, it would cease to be an animal, and become a man. But though the lowest Hottentot can be taught any language of man, the highest animal cannot." And once speech had begun, immense possibilities of progress were in man's grasp; for he could not only talk about what he saw, but reason

about it, argue back to causes, and so to the Highest Cause of all, the idea of God.

And these reasoning powers, wonderful as they are, differentiating man from animals and relating him to God, are only the beginning. Not only can man, unlike all other creatures, say "I am I," but unlike all others he can plan and purpose, consciously set an aim before himself and follow it out; unlike all others he is haunted by the conception of some greater perfection than he has yet compassed, but which he means to strive after. Where is the animal that has dreams of being a better animal, and seeks to realise them? Where is the animal that has deliberately advanced in the scale of being? It is this faculty of vision, of idealism—manifesting itself in the moral sphere as the sense of sin—which has led men forward from the primitive stage to higher and higher levels, has never allowed them to rest contented with the attained, and so given them the mastery not only over nature but over themselves, subduing their fiercer instincts to the dictates of reason and conscience. All this is plainly not inherited from the beasts that perish—and if not from them, if its origin is not from below, must it not be from above, proclaiming man's more than earthly nature?

And even this is not all; even language, reason, conscience, the faculty of idealism, do not yet exhaust the full difference between man and his brute ancestors. Man, the world over, is conscious of belonging to another order of existence beside that revealed by the things of sense; somehow, these do not satisfy him—there is a side of his nature which opens out towards another kind of realities altogether, realities not

apprehended by eye or ear—spiritual things which are only spiritually discerned by a special faculty. Man is universally, persistently, incurably religious. Wherever we meet him, he has had some glimpse into the truth that the visible and concrete things by which he is surrounded are not all, nor even the most important; he knows that there are unseen forces guiding and controlling, forces to which, in some way, he is related and owes allegiance. Of course, that truth does not dawn with any clearness upon primitive man; but even in its crudest and most distorted form it moves him to an awe and reverence that take him out of himself and contain the germ of all his subsequent religious progress. He builds his altars, offers his sacrifices, performs a hundred strange rites and ceremonies, utters formulas of prayer and invocation—and one and all of these spring from the religious instinct and intuition, they attest his oneness of substance with that Unseen he seeks to enter into communion withal. As the steel is drawn to the magnet, and as the needle points to the pole, so the soul of man is athirst for God, for the living God, with a dimmer or clearer consciousness that in Him alone is its fulfilment and its peace. As the writer of the Book of Job has it, "There is a spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding"—an instinctive understanding of their own nature: our reason, our sense of right and wrong, our aspiring faculty, above all our instinctive assurance of spiritual realities which we strive to apprehend—these make the human spirit the candle of the Lord, kindled by His unbegotten radiance, reflecting His own light, bearing testimony to another, higher order of

things to which we belong—the eternal realm of the Spirit.

You ask, What is the bearing of all this on life as we have to live it—what does it mean in practice? I answer, Much, every way. If these are the faculties which we distinctively hold from God, in the sense that they make us what we are, and relate us to Him, we shall surely desire to cultivate them. If by reason of this indwelling spirit man is the lamp, the candle of the Lord, then let us see to it that we trim the lamp, that we guard the sacred flame, for if the light within us be darkness, how great is the darkness! But we can kindle each one of these God-derived and God-like faculties to a brighter glow and, as we do so, enter into a fuller communion with Him who is the Source of our being.

Take the power of reason, first of all. The Book which we are studying lays great and legitimate stress upon instruction and understanding, it commends knowledge as one of the main paths that lead to a full and worthy life, and that because all true knowledge culminates in the knowledge of God. Religious people have not always had a fitting appreciation of the worth of knowledge: they have occasionally talked as if reason were the enemy of faith, and as though we had to choose between head and heart—or rather as though the head had to be cut off in order that the heart might beat the more strongly! You remember the cynical definition of faith as the capacity to believe that which otherwise we know to be untrue. Frankly, the outlook which this epigram satirises is altogether lamentable. There is no conflict between faith and reason, between religion and science; we need not turn down the lamp

of the understanding in order to luxuriate in some dim religious light, so-called. As the Apostle says, "We are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." All truth is from God—all truth leads to God; let us welcome it and trust it, let us "hear instruction, and refuse it not."

And as we ought to keep the lamp of reason brightly burning, so we must guard lest the lamp of conscience grow dim and give an uncertain flicker where the fullest clarity is urgently required. I know that conscience will not tell us in every case just what is the right thing to do, for we have often seen equally conscientious people on opposite sides; but the first and most important thing is that there should shine and burn in us an unquenchable conviction that there *is* a right, and that we ought under all circumstances to follow the dictates of our awakened moral sense. We have to believe that those dictates are from God—not the variable rules of mere expediency and opportunism, but of Divine authority; and as in the symbolism of the older Churches a sacred lamp was kept alight in the sanctuary, which it was held sacrilege to extinguish, so we must beware of putting out or darkening by sophisms and self-deception that candle of the Lord which He has lit in our spirits.

And all we have said of the light of reason and of conscience applies in the highest measure to that supreme faculty which brings our soul into the most direct relationship to God—spiritual vision. Protect this beam, for without it we can never have that clear illumination thrown upon our path which we all need in life's perplexities, in its griefs and sorrows; protect it, for it is exposed to many dangers from worldly cares

and worldly pleasures, from all that is earthy and ashen in ourselves, and there are many in whom that ray has been put out or sadly obscured. In their seasons of prosperity, and when all goes well with them, men are apt to think they can dispense with this lamp, and take no care to keep it burning; alas, if darkness suddenly overtake them, and the heedless, foolish children of the world, terrified by the gloom which surrounds them, exclaim in sudden panic, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out." We touch here upon an exceedingly sad and only too common experience: and the tragic part of it is this, that with the best will in the world it is generally impossible to comply with such a request—impossible, I mean, for one soul to kindle in another the faith which that other has allowed to become extinct. That is why the consolations of religion so often prove ineffectual: they cannot help being so when they are offered to people who have lost the faculty of responding to the religious appeal. No one can overcome long-ingrained habits of indifference to spiritual things in a moment; it takes time and effort to become a Christian; even to pray effectively—I mean, so as to enter at will into communion with God—requires much practice. But they who keep the fire of faith, the lamp of the Lord, undimmed, will find it in the day of adversity, when joy has suffered eclipse, to give forth that blessed light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

There is another side to all this, and concerning that side I would say a few words before I finish. When we speak of the spirit of man as the candle of the Lord, we are reminded of the very important fact that while

God reveals Himself in all His created works, yet His highest revelation, normally speaking, is that which takes place in men and women. We speak about seeing God in nature—we do well; but that which is seen of Him in the phenomena of the universe, leaving out humanity, though it might move us to awe and admiration, would hardly be sufficient for religion in its warmer and more intimate sense. It is God's revelation in man, manifested in the sense of right, the sense of sin, the faculty of aspiration, the mystery of love, that has given birth to religion; it is certain human qualities which we instinctively recognise and reverence as Godlike, that commend God to men; the very conception of the Divine Fatherhood could only come to us through the medium of human fatherhood. Do you not see what that means? God says to each one of us: "Go and be my candle; let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and your goodwill, and seeing, may glorify your Father who is in heaven."

That, no doubt, is quite a familiar idea to you; suffer me nevertheless to emphasise and reinforce it. The Christian, wherever he goes, is to show forth certain clear-shining qualities which will commend his Christianity, and so lead men, whether consciously or unconsciously, to Christ. Lives are the best preachers; and many an obscure Christian man or woman, filled with the constraining love of Christ, practising day by day the dear simplicities of the Gospel, preaches a sermon which he who runs may read, or listen to, and whose closing notes are not heard on this earth at all. Lives are the best preachers, I repeat; it is they alone that "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." It is too sadly true that many a one has lost

his faith in God largely owing to the hardness, the lovelessness, the baseness and treachery he has experienced at the hands of men; it is happily still more true that to numberless others the unselfishness, the staunchness of principle, the Christian manliness and womanliness they have observed in the followers of the Lord Jesus have been means of grace and invincible arguments for belief in Him. We are made and meant, in the words of the hymn, to "hold up to earth the torch Divine": that is a great responsibility, but it is also an exceeding great privilege.

I began by making allusion to our proneness to think that we do not matter, that we are of small account, and I must close upon the same note. In God's good Providence we are none of us cyphers, but units. We none of us know how far-reaching is the influence we exercise, and how, by practising faithfulness, patience, quiet fulfilment of duty, we may help and hearten another soul, making him feel that goodness is after all the one thing worth while. You remember those lovely lines Shakespeare places in Portia's mouth when she returns from Venice to her home in Belmont:

> That light we see is burning in my hall.
> How far that little candle throws his beams!
> So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

And we are candles—our spirits the candles of the Lord; lights whose clear shining may haply show to some perplexed soul the absolute worth of right-doing, the glory of steadfastness, the reward of trust, the joy of self-giving, self-forgetting love, the infinite affection of God—the way home to Him who is ready to receive

the soul that longs for Him. May it be our lot in calm or storm to keep our lamps alight for such service; may it be our wisdom, when their feeble light declines, to rekindle it by contact and communion with Him who is the Light of the World, Christ blessed for ever.

XIV

THE SIN OF HURRY

"He that hasteth with his feet, sinneth."—PROV. xix. 2.

IN Luke's Gospel there is a statement referring to the opening of the Lord's ministry, so quietly and almost casually introduced that we are liable to miss its force: "And Jesus Himself, when He began to teach, was about thirty years of age." Of those thirty years preceding His public activity we know practically no details; we know they were years of obedience to His parents, of apprenticeship to His father, of plain living and unremitting toil for a livelihood at the carpenter's bench, of growth and inward preparation for His work of preaching the Good News of the Kingdom. Prior to His baptism I doubt if Jesus was at all known beyond the nearest villages; but that one crowded year of ministry had been quietly prepared for during the thirty silent years at Nazareth. The greatest moral and spiritual Genius of the race did not approach His task until He had gathered that varied and matchless knowledge of His fellows which only experience of life and labour could give—until much reflection and communion with God had definitely assured Him of His vocation. Never did man act more decisively, once the moment for action had come; never was decision more carefully and conscientiously weighed

than that which transformed this Galilean mechanic into the Prophet of the Highest, the Christ of God. There was nothing precipitate or ill-considered about His public appearance: the Flower unfolded in a day—but only after it had drawn abundant nurture from soil and sunshine and rain and the sweet airs of heaven.

We are reminded of this circumstance, the long, unhasting preparation of Jesus for His immortal task, when we read that very unexpected saying in Proverbs which declares that "he that hasteth with his feet, sinneth." At a first hearing, let us frankly confess, the words fall upon our ears with a strange sound; we are quite sure that there is no merit, no virtue, in dawdling, and we look with pitying contempt upon vacillation, upon all poor weak-spirited folk who either cannot make up their minds as to what they want, or go on letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would." We believe in the strenuous life, in speed, and still higher speed; we delight to think that one powerful mechanism will do the work it formerly took scores of men twice the time or more to accomplish. You have heard about the "Brunsviga," a calculating machine which in so many seconds and with unfailing precision does complicated operations such as a trained human brain could hardly manage in the same number of minutes: "the steel thinker," its proud inventors call it, and with our sense of marvel at its uncanny performances there goes also a sense of mastery. To save time, to annihilate distance, to minimise labour—such are the aims of invention, and we glory in their being achieved; we glory in these achievements so much that it does not strike us that the more

time we *save*, the less time we seem to *have*—surely a strange paradox!

I suppose your preacher is one of the last people to have any temperamental sympathy with slow ways, with letting things occur, or doing them anyhow; so great and genuine is my horror of stagnation, that in preference to mere standing still I would echo Livingstone's impulsive exclamation, "Anywhere, so long as it is forward!" Nevertheless this morning I am going to take up my parable against the Sin of Haste, to insist on the necessity of exorcising the Demon Speed, to commend to you the wisdom of the ancient writer who stated so positively, "He that hasteth with his feet, sinneth." For we have arrived at a pass when we have almost come to idolise speed for its own sake, when our concern is more and more to see how quickly we can get things done, without asking ourselves what we mean to do *then*, how we intend to benefit by the time we may economise, and whether we may not be purchasing our gains in mere rapidity at far too high a price. I would suggest that our hurry and hustling, our idolatry of speed, are bad symptoms, and that we are in serious danger of sacrificing to them what are higher interests; and I wish quite definitely to insist that in this ever intensified "speeding-up," which is so characteristic of our age, there is really the element of sin.

I

Sin against ourselves, if you will, in the first place, for haste in thought and action alike is the enemy of thoroughness, the enemy of good work. We do not give ourselves the time which is necessary for all work

which shall be able to stand the wear of years. Our pulse is feverish, we live for this moment, and perhaps the next, but there is no spaciousness about our outlook. Life is a rush, a scramble, in which there is no room for large thoughts or emotions. We want our results quickly—and we get such results as might be expected from such a temper. We lack patience, and that means we lack faith—our too intense absorption in to-day covers a deep distrust of God's to-morrow. I say again, the best work, that which is to have some quality of permanence, requires time for its growth, for the laying of foundations that will support the superstructure. Here is a man laying small lumps of chalk all over a field at Westerham in Kent; he wanted to find out some important facts relating to the action of earthworms on the soil—how and at what rate they break up the ground—and he knew he could only discover that by digging up the field at some later time, to see how far the pieces of chalk had sunk in. Twenty-nine years he waited before he dug it up, and that is why Darwin's observations stand unchallenged, because the great naturalist was in no hurry—he was after truth, not after money or fame. And here, on the other hand, is a man of science who thinks that he is on the track of a specific against tuberculosis; prematurely, without sufficient tests, his preparation is placed on the market, and proves a vast failure, causing disappointment and worse. That is a case where haste was positive sin—sin against unhappy patients, sin because it involved a reckless gamble with health and life itself. Or here—to illustrate the same principle yet again—is Michelangelo, hard at work on a statue, and a friend visiting the studio observes that

the master has made no progress since he saw the work so many days ago. "Pardon me," says the sculptor, "I have cut these wrinkles on the forehead deeper; the lips now look as if speech were just about to issue from them; the folds of the garment now reveal the form underneath . . ." "Yes, but these are only trifles," exclaims the visitor. "Perhaps so," Michelangelo replies, "but trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." On the other hand, you take a painter like Hans Makart, whose gigantic canvases, gorgeously coloured, were the sensation of their day—the seventies of the last century. But not only were these rapidly-produced works frequently faulty in drawing and modelling, but the brilliant colours have hopelessly faded within a generation, while the frescoes of many a fourteenth century artist still endure. There is a whole parable here, and I need not expound it.

God Himself takes time in producing His results. We have given up the fancy that He created the Universe in six days; we know that unnumbered millions of years have elapsed in the fashioning of this habitable earth alone, in the evolution of life on our planet, in the making of man—and that we are still at the beginning rather than at the end of that evolution:

> Man as yet is being made, and ere the crowning age of ages,
> Shall not æon after æon pass and touch him into shape?
>
> All around him shadows still, but while the races flower and fade,
> Prophet-eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining on the shade,
> Till the peoples all are one, and all their voices blend in choric
> Hallelujah to the Maker, "It is finished, Man is made."

And haste is sin because it is so often prompted by unworthy motives ; work is scamped that pay may be the sooner drawn—and if the jerry-built structure tumbles to pieces, well, that means that another job will be going all the sooner. Haste is sin because so often speed means greed. And even where greed of the more sordid kind is absent, the mere godless craze for quickness at all costs, at all risks, has much to answer for. Where there is blind hurry, there will be many a rush down a steep place. We have all been reading these terrible words in Senator Smith's Report on the wreck of the *Titanic :*

> No sufficient tests were made of the boilers or bulkheads or gearing or equipment, and no life-saving or signal devices were reviewed. No drill or station practice or helpful discipline disturbed the tranquillity of that voyage. . . . We shall leave to the honest judgment of England its painstaking chastisement of the British Board of Trade, to whose laxity of regulations and hasty inspection the world is largely indebted for this awful fatality. . . . Of contributing causes there were very many. In the face of warning signals speed was increased, and messages of danger seemed to stimulate her to action rather than persuade her to fear. . . . The light and the electric letters in the engine-room indicated " Full speed " up to the moment of the collision. . . .

Now there is no preacher's comment needed to point a moral ; here we surely have the most tremendous sermon preached on our text in modern times—preached with every accompaniment of terror and of tragedy.

II

But I pass on to deal with our subject under another aspect—haste as the destroyer of religion. In our

hustle and jostle, in our craving for incessant movement, we are in danger of losing the religious instinct, which does not flourish in an atmosphere perpetually athrob with unrest. We are too busy for religion—in reality we are too wanting in self-collection, in the self-discipline which for the soul's good sets apart a portion of its time for communion with Him from whom cometh our strength. We hurry after a dozen will-o'-the-wisps instead, and are left unsatisfied, not knowing what we lack, having forgotten that in the conscious contact of the spirit of man with the Spirit of God alone is satisfaction and the consummation of desire. We forget the great men of action who were also great men of prayer, and while holding speech with the Eternal renewed their power to deal with the events and claims of the moment. A Cromwell was not too busy to seek God; a Gladstone, during his most strenuous sessions, was wont to kneel in the Abbey for a few moments before entering the arena in the House of Commons. So surely as we allow the rush of business or pleasure to crush out those habits that minister to our immortal part, we are simply laying waste our lives and powers; for in the long run it is only our hold upon things unseen that gives us our mastery even over the things that are seen.

And it is equally true that it is sheer haste, and the superficiality which goes with haste, which account for a very large amount of the unbelief that is so widespread. Hasty, shallow thinking, the perusal of such poor, crude stuff as was served up week by week in the *Clarion*, was sufficient to unsettle the faith of thousands of people claiming to intelligence—in fact, claiming it rather emphatically. Half-truths, half-

understood, seen out of focus and misapplied, turned these readers of Mr. Blatchford's into fervent devotees of agnosticism and determinism, seriously convinced that Christianity had to be smashed in order that society might be regenerated. These were people—I have met a good many of them, and had them firing questions at me—who had evidently never done half an hour's hard, consecutive thinking; people who could tell you that there were contradictions in the Bible, but could not see the crass, gratuitous contradictions in the writings of their pet oracle! Now it was not at all their superior mental acuteness that made such as these agnostics and determinists, that made them feel they could dispense with God for a Father and Christ for a Saviour—it was their impatience and frequently their inexperience of life—hot haste, settling the great problems of faith off-hand, like jesting Pilate who, having asked, with a sceptical sneer, "What is truth?" would not wait for an answer, being in a hurry to pass on to some more congenial theme.

Let me say plainly—there is a type, and not a rare one, I am afraid, of people who would rather prefer to believe that there was nothing in religion, because such a conclusion would leave them so much more free to follow their own inclinations. Religion imposes restraints; it speaks the language of duty—"thou shalt" and "thou shalt not;" it utters its sharp rebukes and unconditional injunctions; it calls sin, sin—not by some high-polite substitute name. Besides, religion makes claims upon our time—and we are busy; with only a week-end, though sometimes of fairly generous proportions, in which to repair the waste of nervous tissue involved in our daily labours, how can

we find time for two services on the Sunday, or even one? Much pleasanter to assume that religion is of no particular account, and spend the day in some form of pleasure, for choice, perhaps, racing along the high-roads at a speed which makes any real enjoyment of nature impossible. I believe that one of the ways in which the King exercised an excellent influence during his recent visit to India was the respect he paid to the religious observance of Sunday; a busy man, he yet found time for the worship of God, and probably did not find it wasted.

And as a fast-living generation, grudging the moments for quiet reflection, rushes past religion and votes it "slow," so it also misses, and that inevitably, the comforts religion alone has to give. On that topic I had something to say a week ago, and need add only a word or two. Speaking normally, the deepest convictions are those that have grown slowly within us, twined themselves round the roots of our inner being, become part of ourselves. You may talk of instantaneous conversions, and I shall not doubt you; but that is not God's regular method, nor is it one in which I have overmuch trust *as* a method. Light-come, light-go. What becomes of the great mass of the converts enrolled after any evangelistic mission? Everybody admits that you cannot trace more than a very few per cent. of them after a year's time. Think of the Welsh Revival of a few years ago, and its deplorable results, which now are patent to everyone, and frankly deplored: the slump has succeeded the boom with a vengeance! That was the method of speed applied to religion, and a woeful failure it has proved itself to be. No, no; it takes time to grow

Christians as it takes time to grow trees, or to grow character: and if we shun the effort, we must not be surprised if the results proclaim the fact. You know the lath-and-plaster affairs people run up almost overnight for exhibition buildings or picture theatres; well, they cannot run up cathedrals at that rate. And there is a lath-and-plaster religion—showy, but a poor shelter in the storm and stress of life, when it goes to pieces; and there is the cathedral type of religion, with foundations laid deep and strong, with prayer a habit from early childhood, the spiritual life cultivated and deepening with growing years, and the custom of referring all plans and desires to the judgment of God, and of trusting the issues of our life to His wisdom and mercy. You cannot improvise that kind of faith, any more than you can improvise York Minster; but where it exists, there will be no rash despair in seasons of adversity, no surrender of courage or principle in the dark day, for we shall know Him in whom we have believed. "I said in my haste," confesses the Psalmist, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes; nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee." And on the other hand, "Here," exclaims the author of the Book of Revelation, writing at a time when the Emperor Domitian was doing his worst against the followers of the Cross, "here is the patience and the faith of the saints." The two things go together in each case—haste with despair, patience with faith and its triumphs.

III

We have spoken of haste as the enemy of thoroughness and the destroyer of religion; let me now suggest

that it is also the great stumbling-block, or at least one of the stumbling-blocks, in the way of a just and charitable estimate of our fellows, and that is a very serious matter indeed. "I said in my haste," to quote the Psalmist again, "all men are liars." I always think it a very delightful touch when in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah the author makes the Almighty say, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it; and if not, I will know." Jehovah is not going to accept the rumour offhand, on hearsay, not till He has convinced Himself directly, and in the meantime He is going to suspend His judgment. Would that men and women acted like that! But we are too often quick to judge, quick to condemn our neighbour unheard, and such haste is of the very essence of sin. Pray, consider how very much all men and women are at the mercy of other people's opinion of them, what deadly and irreparable injury may be done by the thoughtless, eager repetition of ill-natured gossip, passed on from mouth to mouth, and losing nothing in the carrying. It is a strange perversity which makes people so ready—to tell the truth, so pleased—to believe evil of others, to assume as a matter of course that the worst construction that can be placed on any act is likely to be the correct one. I suppose that to indulge in all manner of wanton, unfounded charges and innuendoes against others gives to such persons some of the pleasure of the transgressions they dare not commit themselves, *plus* a sense of superior righteousness. We had occasion ere this to refer to the Pharisees' special vice—their bitter delight in passing condemnation upon others; do what you may, their successors will

prove yours to be a sad case, with pious groans and much shaking of heads. "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" There is no pleasing a settled disposition to misinterpret, to think ill; nor, to be quite candid, is there any reason why one should try. Not that I advise a mere policy of ignoring malicious evil-speaking—few of us are so placed that we can really afford to disregard whatever may be said concerning us; rather would I advocate an absolutely unflinching procedure, and that in order to clear the atmosphere of a vile and poisonous miasma. All decent people must have sympathised with Mr. Winston Churchill, the other day, when he at last brought a libeller to book; just as all decent people sympathised with King George when he took the same step, and sued in the courts of his country like any private citizen to clear his private honour from the unscrupulous aspersions made upon it.

But surely Christian men and women are open to different methods of persuasion. It is our haste that inclines the balance unfairly in our judgments; and "he that hasteth"—whether with feet or tongue—"sinneth," or is apt to sin. The trouble is with men's *desire* to believe evil; this is what makes them accept unsifted rumours, which investigation would many a time entirely dispel. It seems to me that Christian wisdom, to say nothing of Christian charity, will nine times out of ten, when an unkindly or injurious story reaches us, make us unwilling to credit, and exceedingly reluctant to pass it on; we shall in no case do the

latter unless we have convinced ourselves that it is true—no, even that is far from being a sufficient justification: we shall observe silence unless there is some positive moral obligation to act otherwise. We seldom can know all, or anything like all, the facts of any case; and "who art thou that judgest another's servant?" is a good motto to remember. Let us be slow to judge, slow to condemn, slow to cast stones—a dreary and hazardous amusement.

Finally, if the desire for swiftness be very strong within us—well, I am not an advocate of standing still, and there are any number of things we cannot be swift enough about. Ah, yes, let us be quick in composing unhappy feuds, in closing up enmities and disputes—life is too short for them. Let us be quick in acknowledging God's mercies towards us, and turn them to best account, thus showing our gratitude to the Giver. Let us be quick in storing minds and memories with things fair and lovely and noble in nature and art, in books and song, for those are incorruptible treasures. Let us be quick in putting our Christian discipleship into practice, and, being filled with the constraining love of Christ, bring gladness and hope, laughter and praise, into some other lives. The time passes, and we shall not come this way again.

Says the unbeliever, "Let us eat and drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." Says the Christian, "Let us give thanks and join hands and work, for to-day we are alive."

XV

THE FEAR OF MAN

"The fear of man bringeth a snare."—PROV. xxix. 25.

THE story we have been reading from the Gospel again this morning is one that furnishes its own comment. It is a lamentable example of human frailty and defeat. Here is a man who had not only professed the utmost loyalty, but had done so "exceeding vehemently"—no doubt meaning all he said; yet within a few hours he is so utterly disconcerted by the chaff and chatter of a gossiping servant-maid that he denies with oaths and curses any knowledge of the Leader he had vowed to follow to the very death. He was simply demoralised by panic. A moment later he knew what he had done, and we can well believe that his repentance was as vehement as his former protestations of staunchness. Sobbing and bitterly ashamed Peter passes from the ruddy glare of the fire in the court-yard into the outer darkness that matches the darkness within his heart. History records no more pitiable instance of that "fear of man" which, as the wise old writer tells us, "bringeth a snare."

It is easy enough to express our disapproval of Peter's cowardice; at the same time, let us remember that he acted under one of the most elemental of impulses, unnerved and unbalanced by terror. If we

try to picture to ourselves the life of primitive man, we see it overshadowed by perpetual fear. We sing in accents of triumph and hope about

> That universe, how much unknown,
> That ocean unexplored—

but to our ancestors the matter did not present itself at all under such a hope-inspiring aspect. They were afraid—always afraid—of the nature-forces they did not understand, of the way in which winds and rain, drought and lightning might behave, destroying their crops, their dwellings, endangering their lives, all seemingly in mere sport. Primitive man was quite assured that the powers which presided over this puzzling world were either malicious or at least quite irresponsible and arbitrary, and his one endeavour was directed to discovering means of procuring their favour. For a long, long time this notion survived in man's mind, viz., that the world was his foe, and the gods themselves grudged him happiness and success, delighting in the discomfiture of poor mortals, mocking their hopes and bringing them to undeserved disaster: that, and that alone, is the theme of such sagas as those of Œdipus or the Nibelungs—terror broods over them, the sense of a dark, hostile fate ordained by heaven to pursue men and lure them to their inevitable doom. Only little by little man learns that he inhabits a friendly world, fitted and prepared to satisfy his every want—that its forces wait to minister to him as faithful servants as soon as he takes the trouble to understand them; only by slow degrees does he cease to feel hunted, and come to believe that the laws of nature are to be trusted as steadfast and immutable—to be feared by none except

those who break them—that they are the fixed expression of the fixed Will of God, and that that Will is for man's good.

We scarcely realise how modern a discovery all this is; we do not realise either to what extent the farther recesses of our minds are still haunted by the unlaid ghosts of those inherited, ancestral dreads. The very admiration and applause which we bestow upon courage only show how much we feel the power of this arch-enemy, Fear—how difficult it is to overcome.

Let us look this subject in the face as believers in the God of Jesus; and one of the first things we shall find is that even in the popular teaching of religion there is far too large an appeal to fear, an attempt to terrorise us into the right attitude or the right belief. We are told, *e.g.*, that at the very opening of man's history there was a catastrophe which left us all equally lost before God, the objects of His fierce anger; nothing but perdition awaits us unless we accept the salvation offered us from the Cross, and our apprehension and even despair are deliberately roused and played upon to frighten us into such acceptance. "Nothing but our despair," says one of our prominent living theologians, "gives us the whole Christ." It is all very pitiful, infinitely cruel and stupid; there is nothing to choose between nursemaids terrifying babies with tales of the bogey-man and theologians terrifying grown-ups with tales of a bogey-God—except that the latter, of course, ought to know better. It is time, and more than time, we dismissed these sick fancies of an irrationally wrathful Deity who will punish men for the guilt of their first ancestors unless they accept a particular set of complicated and non-moral doctrines!

But when we have dispersed these unreal terrors and nightmares, is there nothing for us to fear in this world? To ask the question is to answer it; we all know that the most ordinary existence has its perils, its menaces, its enemies without and within, and it is no sign of superiority, but only of stolidity, not to be aware of them. As I said before, the very fact that we all admire courage is an admission that we are all conscious of things to be feared; indeed, the higher we ascend in the scale, the more complex our wants and relationships grow, the more vulnerable and exposed to dangers do we become. We fear not merely for ourselves, but for our dear ones, for the success of causes we are interested in, for enterprises that lie near to our heart. To go through life without any kind of uneasiness or apprehension only shows want of imagination and sensitiveness; it is not real courage, for courage worthy of the name does not exist apart from the realisation of danger. In one of his "Jungle Book" stories Mr. Kipling shows the different behaviour of gun-bullocks and chargers under fire—how the former stand stupidly still, unmoved because they do not know what is happening or likely to happen, while the horses, far more highly strung, are acutely aware of the deadliness of shot and shell flying and bursting around them, but do not give way to panic so long as they have faith in the rider who holds the reins. The whole matter is there contained in a nutshell—I mean, the relation between fear and courage; as has been well said, "the unsensitive man lives without fear because he sees no peril in his situation; the sensitive man who is also courageous lives without fear because he sends his thought through all the possibilities of

danger to the ultimate safety." Paul, than whom no braver soul ever breathed, was keenly conscious of the risks he was constantly running, and speaks of himself as having been "in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from his countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren" —neither are there any of us who are spared some analogous experiences; indeed, the wider our interests, the more numerous the points at which we are open to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, just as the Apostle confessed that besides all external troubles there was that which pressed upon him daily, anxiety for all the Churches. If in spite of all this he was the bravest of the brave, it was just because in the thick of the fight, in the roar of the storm, amid the hissings of malice, he "sent his thought through all the possibilities of danger to the ultimate safety."

We shall not simply pretend, then, that there is nothing a man need fear—that is the poorest kind of affectation, an actor's pose, not bravery but bravado; the question is rather how we shall face our difficulties, and what are the right, what the wrong things to stand in dread of. We know, in the first place, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but we know also that that fear has in it no element of abjectness, that it is no slave's crouching terror of the whip, but rather a holy awe in the Presence of an august Will to whose decrees the soul yields obedience, believing them to be altogether righteous and wise and good. An affectionate child would really and properly *fear* to offend or show disrespect to a loving parent, not just because he was frightened of the consequences

to himself, but because of the ingratitude of returning evil for good ; and so in our relations—in the right and normal relations of the awakened soul—to God. We should fear, and sad experience has shown us how well founded is that fear, the sense of inner disharmony that attends wilful sin, the self-degradation, the estrangement from God, which overtake the transgressor. We should fear those things which hurt the soul, which lower our spiritual vitality, and let the earthy have dominion over us. Without that fear, a godly, righteous and sober life is not so much as possible ; here is the beginning, the very alphabet, of wisdom.

But the fear of man bringeth a snare. Fear of what men will say of us. Fear of what men may do to us. Let me explain. As I have said more than once, I do not at all mean to suggest that we are to be indifferent, or that we can be indifferent, to the opinion of our fellows concerning us, to their attitude towards us. When I hear the opposite view put forward with much confidence, I confess I remain singularly unimpressed, for I know to the contrary. The very people who pretend not to care what anybody thinks of them care very much what somebody happens to think. We cannot walk so loftily as not to care. The simple fact is that we are not mere units, living and dying to ourselves, independent of all the rest, but members of an organism, and exposed to the impact of all the other members. Professor Huxley once put it half-seriously that no philosopher, however eminent, would be quite unmoved by a gutter-urchin shouting abuse after him in the street ; that may be exaggeration, but there is a solid core of truth in it. That same brave man, the Apostle

Paul, who faced all manner of dangers without flinching, was unspeakably hurt by the false reports his enemies spread about him, and besought the Thessalonians in turn not merely to hold fast what is good, but to abstain from every *appearance* of evil. It occurs to me that what was good enough advice for Paul to give is probably good enough advice for us to follow.

And again, there is a very real sense in which the most sincere and God-serving Christian may well fear what men may do to him. The moment we leave abstractions and come to concrete facts, we know that it is so. The fear of unemployment, the fear of sickness, the fear of approaching age—these press heavily upon millions of industrial workers, and we can only wish that the fullest success may attend the legislative attempts now being made to lift this weight off their shoulders. Again, to be completely at the mercy of a cruel, or an arbitrary, or a merely indifferent will, as unhappily many people are, is not an inspiring prospect for anyone. Think of Miss Malecka, before her release, with the thought of Siberia before her! For the Jewish population of Russia, with the possibility of an organised massacre never very far removed, existence must be coloured or shot through with fear. We all realise instinctively what Tennyson's Sir Richard Greville conveyed in that passionate cry, "Fall into the hands of God—not into the hands of Spain"—"these Inquisition dogs and the devildoms of Spain." We may never come face to face with such extremities, but we know that there are men and women whose envy, hatred, malice and uncharitableness—whose covetous or vindictive spirit—are to be feared, in the sense that we may reasonably pray not to fall into their power.

Neither is there any doubt that this fear brings many a snare. In a modern play, appropriately called "Chains," we have a pathetic picture of the city clerk who has to submit to any treatment, any curtailment of liberty, to a reduction of his scanty salary, rather than risk dismissal from a post there are plenty only too eager to fill, should he step out of the ranks. And there are employees who will tell you that their livelihood depends on their willingness and ability to give misleading descriptions of the goods they are selling—and what, they piteously ask, are they to do? I wonder whether you saw the evidence of one witness before Lord Mersey at the *Titanic* inquiry, quite frankly owning that he had signed a report recommending a reduction in the number of boats, when all the time he was in favour of an increase; such cases are merely typical of the snares that are brought, the consciences that are limed, by the desire to stand well with powerful superiors, to avoid trouble for oneself, not to get a black mark for a display of inconvenient sincerity. Go to the root of almost every form of dissimulation, every dishonest compromise, every abstention from plain speech or plain dealing, and you will find the fear of man, the fear of consequences. Every reform is hindered, every advance delayed by this same motive:—

> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their current turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.

You remember the case of Copernicus, putting off the publication of his epoch-making astronomical conclusions thirty-six years, terrified lest he should incur

the condemnation of the Church—as in the end he duly did. That is only a typical instance ; the religious reconstruction which we know is due and overdue is kept back to-day by the same influence, the dread of persecution, the fear of heresy-hunts. You remember the terrible satire with which Tennyson makes another of his characters, the Churchwarden, advise the curate : "But never not speeäk plain out, an' thou'll be a Bishop yet." The light is carefully bushelled—or at least artistically shaded—from dread of unpopularity, dread of ostracism, from the fear of man. Not, "What is truth ? " but " How much dare I tell ? " is too often the question that is asked.

It is the same in every field. Ibsen, in " Rosmersholm," shows us a well-intentioned but essentially weak man who has been persuaded to lend his influence to an advanced political programme of which he really approves ; but the moment he avows his sympathies, a venomous press campaign is let loose against him, and with a few moves he is completely and effectually silenced—nominally persuaded that he was mistaken in the views he had espoused, in reality simply terrorised. One wonders how many times the same sort of thing has happened in actual life ; not infrequently, I am afraid.

But, friends, if we have described the disease, how shall we prescribe for it ? I say candidly that for that fear which is the result of economic conditions—unemployment, sweating and the rest—the social reformer and the legislature must in the end devise the economic remedy ; the problem is vast, but the solution should not pass the wit of man, especially when we face it in the light of Christianity. But what

of those other forms of the fear of man of which we have been speaking? Well, I believe the best antidote to it to be that fear of God which is the same as faith in God. In the last analysis all courage, as we have already seen, is rooted in faith: the same Peter who had denied his Lord when his faith in Him was shaken or imperfect, confessed Him with a total disregard of consequences before the High Priest when that faith had taken firm root; and as fear misses its opportunities, so faith makes them. Cowardice is contagious, and so is courage. Let me borrow an illustration. General Havelock, we read, once said that in every regiment of British troops there were one hundred men who would storm the gates of hell, and eight hundred who would follow them. The eight hundred were inspired by faith in their dauntless comrades; the one hundred by faith in their commanders, their cause, their training, or themselves. The remedy for fear is faith, the tonic that renders immune against the fear of man is faith in God.

Please let me explain that, for you know the extreme danger of religious unrealities—and generalities are nearly as bad as unrealities. I mean in the first instance that faith in God, genuine and heart-felt, creates a feeling of security, even in the face of adverse circumstances, which is a safeguard against despair. The man who in all his struggle with external difficulties, exposed to enmity and ill-treatment perhaps, believes that a Father cares for him and will not let him come to ultimate harm and discomfiture—such a one, I say, has meat to eat that the world knows not of. Just as in the material world the moment we obey the laws of nature they become our protectors, so in

the spiritual sphere the moment we render an implicit obedience to the law of God He rewards us with the consciousness of His protection. You can stand up and hold your own against great pressure, undismayed and refusing to be cowed, in the assurance that you have God for your Ally ; you have only to be resolutely on God's side to find Him as resolutely on yours—and one *plus* God is a majority, a working, fighting, prevailing majority. "What ?" they say to Luther, "you are going to Worms to defend yourself ? Don't you know that that is simply to deliver yourself into the hands of your bitterest enemies ?" "If there were as many devils in Worms as tiles on the roofs," is the intrepid monk's reply, "thither I go"—and from Worms he safely returned. He knew whom he believed in, and his faith outweighed and routed his fears. It has been the same with every martyr for conscience' sake and conviction's sake—and by martyrs I do not mean those only who have gone to a violent death, but the far greater number who have endured ill-treatment, evil-speaking, worldly loss, gibes and sneers—all hard to bear and proportionately to be feared—because of their intense faith in something greater and worthy of their absolute loyalty. You see, we look for our heroes in romantic attire and situations full of glamour ; but to my mind the teetotal grocer who refuses to take out a spirit-licence, knowing that by so doing he places himself at a disadvantage and will certainly lose custom, is as real a hero as any knight of chivalry. He has something that compensates him for the fear, nay, the certainty, of loss—a faith in the worth of a principle, the unseen which is more than the seen.

Here, I say, is the escape from the snare which comes through the fear of man; here is the explanation of that dauntless courage of unnumbered believers who out of weakness were made strong, daring and bearing all in Christ's name—an experience which cannot be explained away, and which again and again strikes such jubilant notes as these: "In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid; what can man do unto me?" "Thou art my rock in whom I trust; my fortress—of whom shall I be afraid?" Men spoke like that because they felt like it; and because they felt like it they were strong and conquered. Here we see the secret of exploits such as those of the Maccabees; these were men who knew only one fear—the fear of God—and it delivered them once for all from the fear of man, from the dread of earthly potentates, from paltering with their principles. If perchance we have not succeeded as they have, have we tried, have we trusted, as they did? If we have found our wills too infirm to stand against threats and forebodings of what might happen to us, have we called up our spiritual reserves? The same mighty forces are at our disposal; and where others have triumphed—not in their own strength, but in the strength of the Lord and the might of His protecting arm—we need not fail.

One word in closing. Life has been called a conflict, and for most of us it proves so, nor could we wish our days to flow in a serenity that knew no strife, along an even level with no obstacles to surmount, in a shuttered, sheltered atmosphere which would rapidly become insipid, fatally relaxing to mind and muscle and nerve. Let us rather be glad that we are called to be soldiers of Christ, and as such endure hardness. May I say

that the more seriously we take our vow of discipleship, the less likely we shall be to fall into that merely defiant temper which sets itself purposely to ignore or to antagonise all and sundry in order to show its so-called strength and independence—a temper which in truth has all the weakness of selfishness. But by a steadfast reliance on God, submission to God, a Christian faith and fear of God, we shall acquire that courage which, like love, its twin-sister, vaunteth not itself, doth not behave itself unseemly, is not puffed up, but will deliver us from the snaring fear of man, and enable us to withstand in the evil hour, and having done all, to stand. In quietness and confidence shall be our strength; neither shall we be afraid of evil tidings, knowing that our times are in His hand, and that whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

XVI

THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING

"The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the dead."—PROV. xxi. 16.

I

THERE is one aspect of the genius of Jesus Christ to which most of His followers have been strangely and persistently blind. They have gladly and reverently received from Him the revelation of the Father; they have acknowledged—in theory, if not in practice—His supreme authority as a moral Teacher; they have yielded to the spell of His sublime tenderness, and seen in Him the Embodiment of self-giving Love; but they have largely missed, and the Christian Church has been the poorer for missing, what I must call the intellectual side of His appeal. The truth is, the fact of Christ is too great to be "taken in" by us in its full significance; at the same time it is regrettable that we have neglected that feature of the Lord's teaching and outlook which makes Him, as has been said, "the world's greatest Rationalist."

Let me explain. The Jesus of history was, if I may say so, very little of a mystic, and nothing at all of a sentimentalist: He drove at practice; and to that end He addressed Himself to the reason of His hearers, encouraged them to use their commonsense in dealing with the problems of religion and conduct, and could

express His keen disappointment at their occasionally dull and lumbering intelligence. He had been a bright, inquiring child Himself, and it is probably a true tradition of His early days which tells us that "all that heard Him were amazed at His *understanding*"; and when He had become a public Teacher, instead of assuming dogmatic or superior airs, He appealed to the country-folk who formed His audiences by saying, "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" —thus giving His direct sanction to the great principle of private judgment in religion. When the disciples were slow to appreciate such a distinction as that between outer and inner defilement, or when they failed to see that a phrase like "the leaven of the Pharisees" could not refer to baker's loaves, He rebuked their dulness with the sharp question, "Are ye also even yet without understanding?" "How is it that ye do not understand that I spake not concerning bread?" Evidently He had scant toleration for sheer stupidity or thoughtlessness! Above all, He emphatically proclaimed that God was to be loved, not only with the whole soul and the whole heart, but also with the whole mind or understanding; and we are told that when He saw that the scribe who had asked Him to name the first commandment answered "discreetly" —which does not mean cautiously, but discerningly, intelligently—He said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

Consistently and invariably, Jesus shows Himself a true descendant of those elder sages of His nation who, in the Book of Proverbs, laid so much stress on wisdom, on instruction, on the worth of right knowledge, and who over and over again hold up as a warning example

"a foolish man, a man void of understanding." This is a note whose vibrations are heard from one end to the other of this national collection; and nowhere is this governing thought more pointedly expressed than in the saying, "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the dead." To starve the intelligence, to despise reason, the old writer says, is to condemn oneself to a living death; to stultify the understanding is just a form of suicide. Words could not be plainer or more decisive: let us consider them for a little while.

And in the first place one could wish that this particular principle had been more frequently applied in the field of religion itself. But just as the rational appeal of the Saviour's teaching has been lost sight of, so there has always been a mischievous tendency to cry down reason in religion, to discourage commonsense as the worst of heresies. This distrust of the understanding is most discreditable and injurious to the cause of faith itself, and it is hopeless to tell people, especially young people, with their minds just opening out, that they must not argue about, they must not seek to understand, what they are expected to believe. In vain does a Cardinal Newman beseech men to avoid inquiry if they would escape despair; it was a braver and truer voice which said that "human nature craves to be both religious *and* rational, and the life that is not both is neither." There is no merit in unquestioning submission to dogmas, any more than in the parrot-like repetition of creeds; there is no virtue in mental indolence and shunning the effort of thinking for ourselves, though every priesthood should offer to relieve

us of that trouble. "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" asks Jesus, and there is no evading that query. "Prove all things—hold fast that which is good," urges Paul, and he does not suggest that someone else is to act as our substitute. "He that wandereth out of the way of understanding," says the wise old writer—though such a one should linger in paths that seem more pleasant—"shall rest in the congregation of the dead."

We have touched before upon this unreal antithesis between feeling and thinking in the region of faith, and shall have an opportunity of dealing with the matter at greater length; surely, the gate to the kingdom of heaven is not so low that it will not admit that part of man which is above his shoulders. Of the duties incumbent upon Christians, this one—to walk in the way of understanding, to use their reason in matters of belief—is perhaps the one that has been most systematically neglected, and hence its fulfilment is to-day peculiarly urgent, the paying-off of a long-accumulated debt. We keep muddling along in so much religious uncertainty and bewilderment because so many Christians are too lazy, too timid, or both, to think things out with any degree of clearness—to draw, *e.g.*, the obvious inferences from such an obvious fact as this, that the story of man's fall and expulsion from paradise is myth, that the race therefore is not lost or ruined, that mankind is not fallen, but rising. There is no mystery about all this; there is certainly nothing to be gained, but much to be lost, by denouncing reason or deliberately ignoring what is patent. Let me quote and commend to you a true and trenchant saying of Dr. Ballard's: "The religion which is not from

beginning to end amenable to reason is but superstition in disguise."

II

But turning from these preliminaries, let us frankly recognise that this way of understanding which we are asked to travel is not the easiest ; it demands exertion, it requires determination, for it is often rugged and generally uphill—and the primrose path of dalliance offers many rival attractions. Now the place where we are one and all called upon to make a beginning, is the place nearest home ; we have to learn to understand ourselves—and that is a task which needs not a little candour in the first instance, and possibly a good deal of patience afterwards. Put in this way, it may sound odd enough that we should be asked to go, as it were, in search of ourselves, for what is so familiar to each one as his own ego, the one fact he cannot so much as get away from ? But I believe this very familiarity is often the merest illusion ; as a matter of fact, no one understands himself completely, and I should not like to guess the proportion of people who go about cherishing absolute fancy pictures of themselves, pictures bearing but the slightest resemblance to fact. Let me hint it to you, my brother or sister, the person who gives you the largest amount of trouble is just yourself, and in order to manage that complex individuality you must get properly acquainted with it, take its measure faithfully ; the old advice, inscribed in marble over the gate of the temple at Delphi, "*Know thyself*," still remains the epitome of wisdom : countless the pilgrims who went to consult the oracle, but to every one of them, in addition to whatever might fit their special case, this

counsel was tendered—to know himself—and probably it was the best counsel of all. For if we are grossly in error concerning our own selves, we must needs be in error concerning almost everything else: if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is the darkness!

How to set about this understanding of oneself? Shall I venture to suggest that in a majority of cases the enterprise needs not only candour but humility? We are each the object of most importance in our own eyes, and we start with a considerable bias or prejudice in our own favour; and the fact we have to discover is that we are just ordinary folk, with perfectly ordinary gifts, and certainly no special claims to preferential treatment from our fellows. A little, little gap, and that for a bare moment's space, is all that we can expect to leave in our environment when we depart. The reflection is not complimentary—nor does it convey the *whole* truth—but it is true so far as it goes, and if we will hold it steadily before our minds for a minute or two daily, it will help to correct our quite unfounded self-importance. There are no indispensable people, and if there were, I have an uneasy suspicion that we might not be among the number. The great world owes us very little in the way of deference or ceremony—very little beyond the chance of showing what we are worth—and that is a thing we have first of all to find out for ourselves.

To begin with a fairly modest estimate of our own capacities, *plus* the determination by the grace of God to make the most of them; to prove our *raison d'être* by the calibre of our performances, no matter in what department: this will at least set us on the way—the

way of understanding. And all the time we shall balance the sense of our smallness in the vast total by the sense that however little we may matter to men, we matter greatly and intimately to God, that He cares for us and regards us individually, that He has made, if one may express it in that way, a certain venture in entrusting us with so much initiative and responsible power, and that as He is interested to see what we shall do with it, so we are in honour bound to make the best of His investment in us. You remember Rabbi Ben Ezra's words: "All men ignored in me, *this* was I worth to God."

It is this consciousness which will help us to search ourselves, to be frank with ourselves, to discover our limitations and our possibilities, to find the key to our own character, to note what are our strongest motives and propensities—the special weaknesses to which we are prone and against which we must proportionately be on our guard. After all, this self of ours is the plot we have got to cultivate, and from which we have to raise a harvest; it becomes us to understand the nature of the soil, the produce it is best adapted to bear, what measures to take in order to make it yield the maximum of increase and to keep under the enemies to which it is specially exposed. Above all—and this, though not the most inspiring, is by a long way the most salutary part of our task—let us face our besetting frailties squarely, and call them by their true names. Self-indulgence, greed, indolence, vanity, pride, envy, censoriousness, jealousy—is it in one of these directions that we are most open to attack? I say deliberately that fully one half of the moral tragedies that wreck human lives and happiness have their beginning in a

fatal ignorance of self. Here is poor Cassio—a worthy, kindly enough soul, generous, honourable, devoted, but unable to resist excess in wine, and hardly responsible when he has had a glass too much: had he but known in time that for such as himself the only safe rule is to forswear all strong drink, he would have been spared disgrace and undoing and pitiful, unavailing self-reproach—and cases like Cassio's in one field or another are legion!

And when I speak of understanding ourselves, I mean something more than gaining a timely control over our weaknesses; I mean that in each of us there are vast unexplored regions, our undiscovered, unrealised, unutilised selves—large tracts we have never brought under cultivation, yet which might largely enhance our value to ourselves and to the world. There are all manner of subjects we could take a healthy interest in, only it has never occurred to us to do so; all manner of activities in which we really could get as well as give a great deal of satisfaction, only we have never tried. We do not use anything like all our resources, and we are the poorer for leaving them unused. There has never yet been a Christian Church, for example, which did not contain at least four times the driving power, the possibilities of Christian service and usefulness amongst its members, of that which it actually exhibited. The things we could do, the power for good we could be, if we would only let ourselves think so and act upon the thought! The flourishing state all our Church agencies might be in, the way we could advance Christ's kingdom! Our selves are largely undeveloped estates, which the owners have never properly explored; and the way to fullest self-

realisation is none other than the way of understanding —of self-understanding.

III

But in order to understand ourselves—forgive the seeming paradox—we must understand more than ourselves, viz., our relation to our neighbours, to the larger society of which we are members, something of the world in which we live and move and have our being. That is far too big a subject to treat, as I must treat it, in a word or two, but let me at any rate point you in one or two directions to show what I mean. I wonder, *e.g.*, do we, any of us, try sufficiently to understand the very people with whom we are brought into the most continual contact? And are not most of the major and minor frictions and discords of every day in the last resort due to misunderstandings? Mark you, we quite expect, as our right, to be "studied" by these other people, to have our moods and tenses properly—and favourably—interpreted, not to be judged by mere appearances or occasional hasty words—people surely should know us better! Should they? Do *we* know *them* better than to misjudge them? Ah, is it not the case that often we are so concerned with ourselves and our dues as hardly to trouble to understand—in the sense of properly appreciating—other people and their point of view at all? How many of the tiresome specimens who are pleased to consider themselves "misunderstood"—poor things!—have even made an honest effort to understand those by whom they think they are ill-used? And here I am going to lay down quite a dogmatic principle: to know people thoroughly means to know the best of them; it is only our ignorance

which denies that best. The French aphorism has it that to understand all is to forgive all. I have a feeling that that does not go deep enough. I believe that to understand all means the discovery, nine times out of ten, that we have not so much to forgive. It was because Christ understood men, because He knew what was in man, that He was a more lenient judge of humanity than the Pharisees. It is because God knows all, understands all, that we go to Him for the forgiveness of our sins. Certainly, the way of understanding is that more excellent way which has peace and godly concord for its goal, and that alike between individuals and nations.

IV

And we want to understand more and more of the world we live in, of the social organism of which we form part, in order to enjoy the one and find our proper place and usefulness in the other—and that as religious duties. I am treading very familiar ground in urging the duty of developing and enlarging our interests, of becoming better acquainted with just a little of the immense wealth and variety of the world's wonders which only wait to charm and surprise and delight us if we will condescend to allow them to do so. Let me give quite a personal turn to this by avowing that I continually chafe and fret under the narrowness of my own range, I feel that the points at which I touch life—life which is wonderful everywhere, God's handiwork—are not one tithe of what I would like to be the case; I seem to be all the while passing doors that are not even locked, but would yield to a touch to swing open on their hinges, and through which I might enter

treasure chambers without number and enrich my mind and heart, had I but energy enough. If I may again quote those lines which speak of

> That Universe so much unknown,
> That ocean unexplored—

well, they fill me with sheer impatience that it *should* be "so much unknown" when science and travel and history, music and art and literature are all offering themselves to us, competing for our attention, pressing on us an embarrassment of riches from which to choose —and we so slow in choosing! You remember Fra Lippo's passionate exclamation:

> You've seen the world,
> The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises—and God made it all!

Well, that, at any rate, seems to me the right way to *feel* about the world, and if we do so, perhaps we shall learn to open a door here and there, and enter the treasure chambers, and carry away unfading riches in a truer understanding of some corner of this marvellous Universe.

And this enrichment of our own individuality through better knowledge and wider interests is not merely to minister to our selfish enjoyment; it is to fit us for better service—for obviously we can only serve the world in proportion as we understand it, have mastered some subject, some department of knowledge. The only person who can help, say, in the task of social reform, the solution of social problems, is he or she who has walked in the way of understanding—not of mere ineffectual good intentions; the man or woman

of disciplined mind, of stored knowledge, of trained imagination, of generous culture, of large ideals of life as it ought to be, as it might be. And of course the way of understanding is the way of sympathy with ordinary humanity, with the daily lives of the multitude, the power of putting ourselves in their place; where that is lacking, all mere academic knowledge gathered from textbooks and statistics will be of little avail. And we can only understand men and women by loving them; that was the secret of Jesus and His insight into the human heart.

V

But as we could not hope to understand ourselves without understanding something of the larger life around us, so in the last resort we cannot understand either ourselves or the world aright unless and until we see both in the light of God, that light which burns and shines brightest for us in Christ Jesus. A God-less world is an inextricable tangle, a vexatious riddle without an answer, infinitely meaningless, at best deeply unsatisfactory. Apart from a Divine wisdom guiding the course of destiny, what were the purpose of it all, the struggle and pain, the long story of man's aspirations, failures, triumphs, his pressing forward in spite of discouragements, his sense of something unfulfilled which he has to endeavour to realise? But for the knowledge of God, all this would be so much delusion, and life would proportionately be degraded and lose all real value, for the old phrase, "without hope and without God in the world"—without God and *therefore* without hope—still remains true. Believe me, no materialistic explanation of man or the universe can

satisfy us; no scheme of life that leaves out religion can do justice to our deepest needs; it is only in His light that we can see light. The arch-sceptic of the Old Testament, the writer of Ecclesiastes, has left us an immortal testimony of man's inability to find rest and happiness in the life of sense alone: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing," he complains, "nor the ear filled with hearing"—and why? Let the same witness supply the answer; it is because God "hath set eternity in their heart"—the heart of men—so that they must needs aspire beyond the seen and heard and temporal to the unseen and eternal.

Thus the way of understanding, in the fullest sense, is the way of those who say with inmost conviction, "Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee"—who can take up the Psalmist's strain, "Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, that seek Him with their whole hearts." To interpret the world as the scene of His activities, held in its course by His power and pervaded by His Divine purpose; to view ourselves as His children, called to be His instruments in the fulfilling of His beneficent designs and in the rendering of glad filial obedience to His law to find peace and joy; to see the end of life in willing service and self-giving—that seems to me the noblest, the sanest, and the only satisfying outlook, and to this we are called by the Gospel and by Him who is its Bringer and its Consummation, Jesus Christ. In Him we understand God's purpose to us-ward, and find it to be love: to accept His purpose for ourselves, that is wisdom—to co-operate with it in simple loyalty, that is understanding.

XVII

THE PENALTY OF TEMPER

"A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty."—PROV. xix. 19.

In that wonderful picture-gallery which we possess in the Books of Samuel, rich as it is in vivid portraits, there are few that stand out more forcibly than those of Nabal and Abigail, in that chapter part of which we have been reading together. Was ever likeness drawn in more telling strokes than that of this churlish flock-master of three thousand years ago? We can see him moving about among his sheep and his men, dark-browed, overbearing, uncouth, given to violent gusts of anger before which his subordinates tremble, and withal quite insanely proud of his possessions—the kind of rich boor who, because he is better off than anybody around, holds himself dispensed from the most elementary civility; we can hear one of the servants, after Nabal's contemptuous refusal of David's request, reporting the incident to Abigail, and in despair summing up his master's character in the unvarnished phrase, "He is such a son of Belial"—as who should say, such a limb of Satan—"that one cannot speak to him"; we can see Abigail, her woman's-wit realising the imminent danger that David will take revenge for the insults heaped upon him, and quickly proceeding to avert disaster by rich gifts and

humble words. The whole episode lives before us in the masterly narrative of the old chronicler ; and as we gaze upon the artist's canvas, its colours unfaded after thirty centuries, we behold a perfect picture, true for all time, of the feebleness of rage, the strength of gentleness.

The lesson is one of those which each generation, indeed, each individual, has to learn over again—which proves that it is a lesson difficult to learn, or at least to put into practice ; the truth which it teaches is set forth again and again, with peculiar reiteration, by Israel's sages in their proverbial wisdom, which in turn shows the importance they attached to the subject. You have noticed the habit of these writers to identify every kind of virtue with wisdom, and its contrary with folly—it is the foolishness of sin that strikes them, and which they wish to impress upon their readers ; so, in the present instance, we are told that "a fool uttereth all his anger : but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it"—"It is an honour for a man to keep away from strife ; but every fool will be quarrelling."

In dealing with this theme let me in the first instance safeguard myself against being misunderstood by saying plainly that there is a place for strife, a place for anger, for strong speech and strong action. We have no business to try to pass through a world of conflicting forces without taking sides ; we are simply cowardly when, in order to save ourselves possible discomfort or unpopularity, we cautiously forbear uttering a word of censure upon some powerful evil or abuse. We cannot sympathise very strongly with the right if we can see it overborne without coming forward

in its defence; just as, *e.g.*, you would not give very much for the alleged friendship of anyone who could hear you traduced and held up to scorn without quickly and warmly protesting. The truth is stated in those two famous lines of Browning's:

> Dante, who loved well because he hated,
> Hated wickedness that hinders loving.

It was the Divine pity and tenderness in Jesus which filled Him with Divine indignation against the hypocrisy and hardness of the professional religionists of His day; His was the wrath which has been well described as "the second, hotter flame of love"—and those who have never felt the like anger when face to face with some great wrong, have small claim to be considered His disciples. I would go so far as to say that probably no vested abuse has ever been routed until men's hearts were stirred to a generous anger against it, and they determined that this must not continue. You can argue round and round some evil, show that it is wasteful of life and happiness, convince the intellect that it is unnecessary and could be remedied—and get no forwarder; but let a spark of feeling be kindled—let men and women once say with conviction, "This is wicked, and we won't have it!"—and the days of that abuse are numbered. "Be ye angry and sin not," says the New Testament: by all means let us refrain from sinning—but by all means let us be angry upon the right occasion, when some meanness has to be exposed, some injustice to be redressed, some conspiracy against the light to be unmasked.

But when we have entered this necessary proviso

against misinterpretation, we come back to the truth which the Book of Proverbs so frequently emphasises, and which both Scripture and life press upon us—the foolishness and feebleness of the habitually explosive disposition, the ungovernable temper, the petulant outbursts provoked by trifles, the storms of passion roused by any chance breeze. Here is Naaman, terribly disappointed because instead of having his leprosy cured by means of magic, he is recommended to take a course of frequent river baths—" and he turned away in a rage." Here is Jonah, annoyed beyond bearing, first because the repentance of the Ninevites has averted the doom he had prophesied on the city, and again because of the withering of the gourd which had given him shelter. " Doest thou well to be angry ? " asks the Divine Voice, gently rallying him on his ill-temper. " I do well to be angry, even unto death," comes back the sulky answer, almost smothered by resentment. . . . Wasn't he foolish ? Here is Peter, at the moment of supreme crisis, when his Master is being arrested, and the only thing he can do in his ineffectual wrath is to give a touch of the grotesque to the scene by an exhibition of bad swordsmanship, aiming at a man's life, and inflicting a scratch on his ear—wasn't he absurd ? Here is a member of Parliament, losing all sense of decency and control over himself, spluttering incoherent insults at the Prime Minister—and what has he done except injured the prospects of the cause he was championing, and incidentally made himself ridiculous ? " A fool uttereth all his anger " ; and " a man of great wrath shall bear the penalty."

Now I believe that most people have a fairly keen

objection to being thought ludicrous, and hence probably the makers of maxims among the Hebrews displayed a great deal of shrewdness in laying so much stress upon the absurdity of ill-temper. The person who is always ready to fly into a towering rage when his august will is crossed not infrequently fancies he is being impressive when he " lets himself go " ; well, he may succeed in frightening people, shaking their nerves, even to the extent of making them give in to his stormings sooner than live in a perpetual hurricane—but mixed up with their fear, and while they are making concessions to an individual who is beyond arguing with, there is a deep contempt for his weakness—the weakness of a man who, while he would loudly claim to be master in his own house, is not even master over his own mind. Nabal's herdsmen no doubt feared him, trembled at his tantrums, but which of them, down to the brown-skinned, half-naked youngsters that minded his goats, did not really despise his master ? You can positively fancy the curl of the lip and the shrug of the shoulders with which his servant says : " One cannot speak to him." And this contempt is justified ; lack of self-control is a spectacle at which we have either to smile or to manifest disgust. Even Shylock, when he enters in utter frenzy after discovering his daughter's flight, wronged though we know him to be, is not tragic, but simply grotesque ; and the most utterly laughable figure I can recall is that of a Continental railway official, dancing about in his rage, breathing threatening and slaughter, purple with fury, and all about nothing ! You knew instinctively that this was just the ordinary, every-day routine with this good man—that that was his way, and a ridiculous,

wasteful way, of going through the day's work, with a totally unnecessary expenditure of energy, and so you watched his antics in mere wondering amusement.

But there is, of course, a tragic side to all this, as there is to all human folly; and the mediæval Church was not wrong in placing unbridled anger among the deadly sins, for when it is not curbed it becomes the source of many a rash deed too late repented of; it is the sin of Cain—it is, as has been rightly said, the especial sin of the home, the sin which darkens and poisons home-life, where so many people think themselves free from the self-restraint which governs their conduct outside. And I think I am appealing to very general experience when I say that after the fit of passion has spent itself, after the hot, angry, ugly words have been spoken, every one who has passed through that experience feels conscious in retrospect of the tragedy that has taken place, of lowered dignity, of the irretrievable injury possibly caused, but certainly sustained, and grieves that it should be so. Why, why did we allow ourselves to proceed along that unhappy line? Why could we not have left just that one thing unsaid? How did it all begin? . . . How did it begin? I will tell you. All this unnecessary friction which lays waste our powers, all the giving way to temper—note the phrase "giving way," which is itself indicative of weakness—has its origin in undue self-regard, undue self-importance, which blinds us to the inviolable rights and claims of others. The world has to arrange itself in accordance with our individual desires and preferences, other individualities must forgo their development in order to fall into line with

our scheme of life—and when these things refuse to happen, we have a grievance, and behave accordingly! And then—then matters proceed along the familiar, the inevitable lines, for, says the Proverb, summing up sad experience, "the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out waters: therefore leave off contention before there be quarrelling."

This self-regard, this self-centredness, which lie at the root of so many unhappy and preventable disputes, are deeply irreligious—indeed, they are in their essence the very negation of religion. We are not content to be members of the human family, children of the Universal Father, on the same footing as His other children, but make ourselves and our likes and dislikes the standard by which the rest are to be judged—intolerable presumption! And we are even rather proud of the number and variety of our antipathies—antipathies, which are the cheapest of all things to grow, and the dearest to harvest; and those who do not conform to this arbitrary standard erected by self we conceive we have the right to treat with disdain or to let them feel our displeasure—and all the while the only standard that counts is God's standard, set up in Christ Jesus! It is because we so persistently disregard that Divine Image that we are so sublimely unconscious of our own shortcomings and imperfections, so impatient, uncharitable and irascible with those of others. I said that antipathies are the cheapest of all things to grow, and the dearest to harvest; for the man who habitually lets his dislikes get the better of him, who does not mind how roughly he offends other people—who, after all, have a right to exist—such a man in the end wears out the patience of his associates; they

regret, with a shrug of the shoulders, that So-and-so should be so difficult to get on with—that one should never know when or where he might break out—and in the end leave him to himself as a really impossible companion. You remember Herbert Spencer's shrewd remark on Thomas Carlyle, who was always "gey ill to live wi'": Carlyle, Spencer observes, "seemed to suffer from a daily secretion of curses, which he had to vent on someone—and after a while I grew tired of having them vented on me." How natural a conclusion, and who shall blame the philosopher for reaching a point when he felt that he did not choose to make himself the daily target of Carlyle's savage and intolerant invective! Nabal—even when he is a Nabal with brains—is not a favourite; it would be strange if he were!

But, says the Proverb, "the discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." Now there are some kinds of "discretion" of which I confess that I hold a poor enough opinion—that in particular which is, with so many people, the better part of valour, and which keeps them from ever risking anything for principle; but the word is used here in the sense of discernment—and what is discernment but a sense of proportion, which is itself the mark of sanity and strength? We show that sense when we realise that after all we do not stand in the centre of the Universe—that the world does not revolve around us, and that we cannot reasonably expect our individuality to furnish the measure to which the whole of our environment shall move—and once we grasp that elementary principle

firmly, we shall be delivered from many temptations to unwarrantable wrath when things do not go exactly as we should prefer them to. Discernment will make us slow to anger—especially the humble discernment of our failings and failures, of our own need to be gently rather than sternly judged. And it is the glory of a man—of a strong man or woman—to pass over a transgression, when, that is to say, it is a transgression against oneself. It is the mark of a little mind to be easily ruffled, ready to take offence: in a larger mind, busy with bigger issues, petty injuries will take a very secondary and even negligible place—and by merely ignoring such, we may defeat an offensive intention. You all know the story of Frederick the Great—how, when it was reported to him that the walls of the capital had been plastered with a scurrilous attack upon himself, he instructed the zealous police, instead of prosecuting the author, to have the offending broadsheet posted lower, so that it might be more easily legible. He could not have better demonstrated his own disregard of the attack, or his trust in the citizens' proper estimate both of himself and his assailants.

And it is certainly true that, just as a chronic inability to restrain ill-temper is always a sign of weakness, so gentleness is both a source and evidence of strength. To be able to state one's side quietly argues a good case, to begin with; to meet violence and churlishness with serene courtesy shows a Christian spirit, and is at the same time a presage of victory. It takes a strong mind to keep back the hurtful word; it takes a strong personality, conscious of his strength, to waive minor points in a dispute, to make concessions which will

minimise friction without surrendering principles; it takes the strong to be gentle, and by gentleness to prevail where unmeasured vehemence defeats itself. Who was the strongest—Nabal, with his studied insolence, David, who was about to exact vengeance in multitudinous slaughter, or Abigail, whose courteous speech and action kept David's sword sheathed, turned away wrath, and healed the injury wrought by her boorish lord? Even when right seems most unmistakably on our side—perhaps then most of all—is not the attitude of "Come now and let us reason together" preferable to that of mere denunciation and execration and menaces? Denunciation can do little by itself except to harden and exasperate those against whom it is directed; and a threat, it has been wisely said, is a promise which we may find it excessively inconvenient to redeem.

But I am very anxious to lift this whole subject from the level of prudence to that of religious duty. I have already suggested that we shall best acquire the virtue of gentleness in dealing with, and judging, others in the light of that revelation of our own imperfection which we have in Jesus Christ. Surely, we who are, every one of us, so immeasurably far from the ideal realised in Him, must have a very clear case against our brother before pronouncing a root-and-branch condemnation upon him. But you cannot overlook this fault, you cannot forgive, you say? Then, my brother or sister, you assuredly lay up much suffering for yourself, for such suffering is inseparable from an unforgiving spirit, and there is no juster punishment under heaven. But, moreover, how shall we sue for pardon, declining to give it? In the poet's searching question, "How

shall we hope for mercy, rendering none ? " And is not our whole hope that *He* is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, in whose sight, if He were strict to mark iniquity, who should stand ?

But there is more to be said than even this. The spirit of ungoverned anger is essentially weak, because it is essentially one of self-indulgence—indulgence of our least worthy, least rational self ; our temporary passion must find relief in violent speech or action, though the result should be havoc and irreparable mischief, the infliction of poisonous wounds which will rankle and fester. We have all known cases where one bitter, contemptuous phrase, uttered in a gust of anger, has left an ineffaceable impression on another soul, causing years of misery—always and always, across the widening gulf of time, the recollection, " Yes, but he said *that.*" Surely, we should reflect seriously, and more than once, before we risk such consequences by an explosion which after all can be prevented. There are acrid wrangles which kill something in both disputants, leaving each of them poorer alike in respect for the other and in self-respect, and that because both have been weak, where one at least might have been strong, and refused—as it is always possible to refuse at any moment—to go on. You remember the lines in that heart-broken poem of Browning's :

> What so wild as words are ?
> I and thou
> In debate as birds are—
> Hawk on bough !

Here we have the after-reflection of one who has been left simply worn out by a furious quarrel, and in that

exhaustion of flesh and spirit she is willing to make it up on any terms :

> Let's contend no more, love,
> Strive nor weep :
> All be as before, love—
> Only sleep !

Yes, but it is a maimed and injured soul that speaks, or rather sobs, in those words, and we know that all will *not* be as before, because something has gone which cannot be replaced by the most abject submission on the one side, or the most unmeasured regrets on the other. It may be mere foolishness which uttereth all its anger ; "but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it."

That is the point at which I want to arrive, and which I want to press home—the religious duty of self-mastery, of gentleness, of much patience in our dealings with one another, imperfect as we all are. We are here, under God's Providence, for the purpose of giving and attaining happiness, and to act needlessly in a way contrary to that end—to be easily provoked and a source of provocation—is very grievous folly, and worse than folly. And ninety-nine times out of a hundred the sin we are committing is simply a specific form of the sin of haste. We are yielding to sudden impulse, instead of putting on the brake, and the vehicle rushes headlong down a steep place. In by far the greater proportion of cases a short delay would prove quite sufficient to cool down the hot temper, to modify the angry word ; and the unclouded brow, the calm voice, the quietly-uttered complaint or rebuke—if rebuke or complaint are called for—will effect far more than a very deluge of reproaches or a thunderstorm of

invective. And may I again remind you that the control of our expression and tone rests largely with us, that serenity of voice and mien can be cultivated, and that a determination to cultivate them will provide us with the best and simplest weapons to prevent strife and collision. The "soft answer" of which the old writer speaks need not be servile or submissive, but the quiet answer of a man or woman too strong—and by that I mean too Christian—to give way to anger upon slight occasion. As has been wisely said, "he who speaks, speaks twice"—his tone conveys fully as much as the actual words he uses, and thus it is possible to blend firmness with gentleness, and to give a new meaning to the old saying—Samson's riddle, you remember—"Out of the strong came forth sweetness."

Do we ask for the secret of that strength and that sweetness, mingling in perfect harmony, neither too stern nor too cloying? It is an open secret, like so many others we pass by—none other than the spirit which was in Christ Jesus; let us seek to have that mind in us, and insensibly discords will melt into unison, our lives be filled with godly concord, and our so many needless and fruitless contentions be sunk in one great peace—the peace of the children of God.

XVIII

THE WINNING OF SOULS

"He that is wise, winneth souls."—PROV. xi. 30.

WHEN you read the Book of Proverbs a few chapters at a time, you are conscious of a good deal of reiteration. The same faults are remonstrated with, the same virtues and graces commended, at short intervals; the same stock characters—the sluggard and the diligent, the man of violence and the one slow to anger, the hoarder of wealth and the liberal giver—make their appearances in chapter after chapter. It could hardly be otherwise in the great commonplace-book of the Hebrew nation, embodying the reflections of many minds on the varied problems of living; the tone of this whole collection, as we have so often seen and said, is in the main practical, dealing with the affairs of every day—hence the identical topics come up again and again, and while religion is everywhere *assumed*, it is seldom treated explicitly.

But now we come to a saying of quite a distinct and exceptional character, without parallel in all the rest of Proverbs, or for the matter of that in all the rest of the Bible; it stands quite isolated where it occurs, and after reading about the folly of suretiship, the blessedness of liberality, the vanity of trust in riches, and suchlike mundane topics, we own to a certain

surprise in lighting upon the sentiment, "He that is wise winneth souls." The words come upon us with all the effect of a line of poetry in a science textbook; and with our attention aroused by their very unexpectedness, we fall to asking ourselves what the writer could have had in his mind in penning this aphorism.

I

Well, the first thing that has to be said, definitely and with emphasis, is that he certainly was not referring to what is known as "soul-winning" in the language of modern Evangelism. He did not mean anything theological at all. He did not for one moment think of getting people to accept, or to say that they accepted, some doctrine, as the one and only means of rescuing them from everlasting perdition. Nothing would have been further from his thought than the notion that a man could be "justified" in the sight of God by merely believing certain dogmas—"saved" by faith apart from works. He could never have made the strange mistake of drawing an artificial line between religion and conduct, between religion and life; for, to adapt Byron's well-worn lines, religion is not "of man's life a thing apart," but concerns his "whole existence." To the writer of our text, we may be quite sure, the soul meant nothing less than the entire individuality, with all its faculties, and whoever would win souls, as *he* understood the term, would have to address himself to the whole man or woman, not to some rarefied, ethereal, intangible part of their being.

That is the initial point to be made quite clear. And now we will glance at the other two important words in this brief sentence—"He that is *wise winneth* souls"

—" winneth " and " wise." To *win* a human being is, we may take it, tantamount to winning him over to some point of view, to a certain resolution, to make him take his stand on a certain side. Now we all know what is meant by a winning manner—how often we have envied the fortunate individuals who seemed naturally endowed with that gift, who could state their case and advance their claims in a way it was difficult to resist, who could make you do things without hurting your feelings, convincing you somehow that those were the right things to do, though you had not thought so previously! Someone else may urge just the same course of action on you, but his manner, his very tone, has an aggressive quality which rasps you, ruffles you, rouses your opposition—and he fails to carry you with him, however cogent his arguments may be. Now souls—men and women—have to be *won*, not hustled, not coerced, not threatened. The appeal even of religion, however majestic, must respect man's reason, nor seek to carry the inviolable sanctuary of the soul by force; no one has ever yet been driven into heaven as into a sort of concentration camp, at the point of the bayonet or the crack of the whip, and He who understood the human soul as no one else has ever done, used the note of appeal rather than of command or menace. Soul-winning—the influencing of men and women for the better—which is not first and last persuasive, is a contradiction in terms.

And that is merely to affirm that only the wise are equal to so delicate a task—wise, that is to say, with the wisdom, not of the schools, but of the heart, taught by God and by personal experience, for without experience and insight there can be no sympathy. A

hard and censorious spirit never wins souls to righteousness—it alienates them. To condemn human frailty is easy enough, especially when it is a case of compounding—

> for sins we are inclined to
> By damning those we have no mind to,

but to help and restore the hapless victim of frailty is a very different matter. And the wisdom which such an enterprise requires always springs from personal goodness as the first condition—we must *be* good if we are to *do* good. That sounds a very obvious copy-book maxim, I know, but if this elementary principle were heeded, we should be saved from an immense number of unqualified practitioners trying to improve their fellow-mortals without possessing any conspicuous call or aptitude for the operation. Let me quote a sentence or two of Mr. Arnold Bennett's, which beneath their surface cynicism contain a considerable measure of truth: "You are not in charge of the universe," he tells the meddlesome; "you are in charge of yourself. You cannot hope to manage the universe in your spare time, and if you try you will probably make a mess of such part of the universe as you touch, while gravely neglecting yourself"—and, using a lively metaphor, he warns us against the amusement of "prancing about at random on other people's private lawns." That is only to put into the language of the man of the world the Apostle's searching query, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" In other words, let the work of reform begin at home, since it cannot profitably begin elsewhere; the first

soul to win, before we can hope to influence others for good, must be our own—in the familiar lines of old Chaucer,

> The lore of Christ and His Apostles twelve
> He taught, but first he *followed it himselve.*

He that is *wise*—who has sought to order his life aright according to Christ's two great commandments, and who at the same time has been rendered humble and sympathetic by the remembrance of his own struggles and occasional failures—he it is that winneth souls.

II

And now, having said so much, I would remind you of what we so constantly overlook, viz., that in the widest and also the deepest sense we are all of us soul-winners or soul-losers all the time. I do not mean that we are consciously engaged, or meant to engage, in religious propaganda, least of all the kind which button-holes a stranger with the question whether he is saved; I do mean what is implied in the words, "No one liveth to himself, and no one dieth to himself." I mean that we each of us continually exercise influence of some kind upon those with whom we are brought into daily contact, and that we are responsible to God for the influence we do exert. This responsibility is inalienable—we cannot shuffle it off on to other shoulders. People are the better or the worse for consorting with us, just by the casual acts they see us perform, the casual remarks they hear fall from our lips. I would say that ninety-nine per cent. of the influence that forms

character—forms or malforms it—is exercised unconsciously, and undergone half or quarter-consciously; but it is there, all the same. This thought, that we are all along, every day and all day, subtly shaping and colouring other minds, helping to weave the threads of other destinies, making or marring human souls, should give us pause. I remember in the Rijks-Museum at Amsterdam seeing a picture, "The Soul-Fishers"—a very crude and naïve affair, boats manned by monks tossing on the billows, and the monks, equipped with fishing-rods, hauling out as many as they could of the innumerable souls perishing in the waters. Well, as I said, that is an extremely crude pictorial rendering of a truth which concerns us all—not merely one class or profession. We can all win souls, touch lives to finer issues, and that by nothing more miraculous than by our own daily walk. The one transforming, uplifting force whose attraction never fails to tell is personal goodness, doing its work without advertisement, diffusing its fragrance without an eye to effect or consciousness of an audience; the one contagion that cannot be stamped out is what has been called the contagion of character. Practice, example is the great preacher; what makes Jesus supreme is not only what He taught in precept, but the ineffaceable impression He made by His life. The spectacle of high-mindedness, courage, loyalty to principle, unselfish devotion—that is what stimulates the like qualities in the beholders, and introduces, as it were, a moral ozone into the whole atmosphere. Here is one out of a number of employees who quietly, unostentatiously declines to permit himself some minor irregularity or trifling dishonesty sanctioned by bad custom; his mates may call

him a fool, but his fidelity shames them, and while he may be persecuted for a while on account of his staunchness to principle, the time comes when he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. The other day they buried a plain, poor woman, who had been caretaker at a little chapel on the Thames-side. She had, we read, known her share of sorrow, but so far from it having hardened her, there was scarcely a neighbour of hers but had experienced her ministry. When the simple funeral procession passed along the road, rugged waterside men and cement workers out on strike doffed their caps, as princes might at the passing of a queen. Don't you see what had happened? This obscure saint, with the vision of the Saviour shining in her heart, prompting her to deeds of helpfulness, kindly service and devotion, had been winning souls all the while, brought a ray of sunshine into drab and dreary lives, and incidentally commended to others the creed which she so faithfully lived out. The logic of the ordinary man does not go astray; he sums up the situation by saying, "Well, it can't be a bad sort of religion which makes anyone act like that." Alas, when the world has occasion to draw the opposite conclusion, and to remark, "If those are your Christians, we'll do without Christianity!"

I say again, practice is the great preacher. You have heard the story of the young law student in Edinburgh seeing through the window opposite his own a hand toiling with pen on paper from morn till eve, and the immense impression made on him by this exhibition of unflagging industry and perseverance—how it stirred and spurred him on. The hand was that of Sir Walter Scott, labouring indefatigably to pay off

the debts in which an ill-starred publishing venture had involved him; little did he think that while he was fulfilling the dictates of duty, he was also acting the part of soul-winner to John Lockhart, his future biographer.

Here is a truth we cannot emphasise too much—however humble and undistinguished our place in the world, we are centres radiating influence all the time, and by our self-mastery or self-indulgence, our fortitude or cowardice, our patience or hot haste, our charity or want of it, we affect our whole environment. The very office boy will take his cue from the tone of the clerks—they will largely help to make or mar, win or lose, the soul of that youngster, by their conversation, their habits of industry, punctuality, sobriety, or the opposite. Thousands of young lives are destroyed year-in and year-out by bad examples carelessly given. But let me give you one more illustration if I may. You would not think of Mr. Victor Grayson in the character of a soul-winner, but I once saw him in that rôle. It was at a crowded meeting where he was the speaker, and an individual whom I had noticed all the evening suddenly and quite deliberately hurled a missile at him—hit him full in the face—and bolted, was pursued and captured. The meeting was furious with the hooligan: "Hand him to the police!" called dozens of voices. "Certainly not," said Mr. Grayson; "let him go." I suggest, and I do so quite seriously, that Mr. Grayson by his instant magnanimity was winning our souls from fierce passion and vindictive feelings to a better spirit, and I would fain think that even the soul of his assailant was touched to something like compunction as it could not have been touched by a police-court sentence.

III

Soul-winning by example, that is the principal and obviously most effective method; may I now suggest another, which might be a good deal more widely practised—I mean soul-winning by encouragement, by appreciation, by showing that we recognise and value every good impulse in our fellows, every effort in the right direction we see put forth. Such appreciation is a veritable means of grace, and where it is judiciously given—I do not mean indiscriminate eulogy—it helps on that development of faculty and character which we are only too anxious to witness. I do not know how it is we are so apt to be unduly sparing with the word that cheers and maybe puts new heart into another's exertions. It is with some people as though it hurt them to show that they are pleased or gratified; for some mysterious reason they grudge themselves what has been called the noble pleasure of praising. It is as if they went on the theory that, given the right seed and the right soil, the plant will duly grow and unfold without further fuss or ado. Nonsense—the plant needs its proportion of sunshine and genial moisture, and if that is true in the vegetable kingdom, how much more in the moral and spiritual!

Again, "he that is wise" will excel in this branch of soul-winning; for he knows how he himself has been helped in his endeavours by the approval, the frank sympathy of others, when otherwise he might have failed. I could tell a story of a young minister, standing for the first time on the denominational platform, horribly nervous, not at all sure of his reception, the audience swimming before his eyes; and then, how

happy accident or more likely some form of magnetism fixed his gaze on just one face, a face that beamed encouragement and goodwill at him across rows of chairs—and all at once his nervousness dropped off him, and he felt he just *could* make his speech—made it, and sat down knowing he had not done so badly. What a debt he owed to that smiling, friendly face heliographing its message of cheer! Here is your college boat slipping over the water in hot pursuit of another; will it overtake its rival? The crew are almost exhausted, but their friends are running along the tow-path, keeping up a chorus of "Well rowed—Oh, well rowed!"—and when with a final spurt the race is won, it seems to me that the runners have had some share in the success as well as the rowers. Yes, and you can help another to win the race of life by just keeping within sight and letting him see that you care, and want him to reach his goal. The struggle is hard for most of us; it is desperately hard when we have to wage it all alone, no one seemingly minding whether we pull through or go under.

May I say again that we could and ought to do more in giving recognition to every right aspiration and earnest effort. I do not know if it is just thoughtlessness that makes us take it as a mere matter of course when some one does his best and utmost, not thinking it worth acknowledgment. But it is not easy to go on doing one's best when people seem indifferent to one's efforts, and I even suggest that this outward indifference and coldness is bad policy. Yet such is our way; we may not stone the prophets, but as a rule we take care not to honour them to any alarming extent till after they are dead—when, of course, our praises cannot

turn their heads any more. We are rather afraid of showing our admiration or affection, much like the character in "A Pair of Spectacles," who says of the son he bullies, "Ah'm varra fond of yon lad, but Ah don't let him see it." In the name of all that is sensible, why not? Why not let it be seen that we are stirred, that we think such and such a fine performance, or at least a fine attempt? Let us show our interest, show our appreciation of every plucky stand against big odds, of the grit and endurance displayed in the discharge of a difficult duty, of the staunch resistance offered to a tempting lure or bribe—recognise and so encourage uprightness, fearlessness, sincerity, especially when these qualities are shown by the young and untried; believe me, a rightly timed "well done" has not its equal as an aid and stimulus to better doing—it is a most excellent and practical form of soul-winning.

IV

First, then, by example; secondly, by encouragement. Is that all? Or have we not also to deal with the question how to win souls, not merely *to* something but often *from* something else in the first instance? That is a subject which would require a sermon to itself for adequate treatment, while I have time only for a suggestion or two. It seems to me that there is a good deal to be said for the commonsense method of the Book of Proverbs, which consistently and unhesitatingly points out the futility of sin, the folly of evil-doing, in the light of the consequences that attend it. I glance at a page opened at random, and the first verses that meet my eyes are these: "The

hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. The way of the Lord is a strong hold to the upright; but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity. The righteous shall never be removed; but the wicked shall not dwell in the land. The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom; but the froward tongue shall be cut off." You remember the to-do there was a few years ago when Mr. Campbell declared that sin was a blundering quest for God; I said then, and say now, that he would have been perfectly correct if he had described it as a blundering quest for happiness—a search in the wrong direction—and that is the simple truth we must hammer away at. "He does not win who plays with sin," said the unhappy poet who condensed into that rhyme his own most sorrowful experience.

But the perfect method of winning, or weaning, a soul from sin is that of Christ, the method which displays goodness as infinitely desirable, satisfying, and above all *attainable*. May I say that in this respect as in most others our failure is due to our unwillingness to learn from Christ. Again and again His professed followers have committed the capital error of making virtue almost repulsive—certainly the reverse of attractive—frightening people away from it by giving it a gloomy, forbidding aspect, and expressing the sum and substance of all morality in a comprehensive series of peremptory Don'ts. They have all but preached the holiness of hideousness, and frowned upon joy. But asceticism, whether monastic or Puritan—austerity, primness, downcast looks and dismal mien—are no part of Christ's religion; He means the Christian life to be the happy life *par excellence*; He said in so many

words—and one wishes people would reflect upon them —" My yoke is *easy*, and My burden is *light*," while the yoke of sin is heavy, and the burden of guilt is crushing. He calls us to a life in which the whole man, with all his faculties, shall be harmoniously developed, a life richer in happiness than any other ; that is what He wants to win our souls to, by setting up an attractive force stronger than evil, by proclaiming a message of life, " good tidings of great joy."

And He tells us that this happy and satisfying life is possible and attainable ; that there is no need to give up hope though in the past we may have failed not once but repeatedly ; that by God's grace co-operating with our efforts, we may liberate ourselves from the dominion of evil, and find the Father's house and the Father's arms open to receive us. That is Christ's glorious Gospel of hope, which makes Him of all others the great Soul-winner, who is able to loose the world from sin and reconcile it to God : may we learn from Him His victorious faith in human nature—even our own nature—in its Divine possibilities, in its heavenward destiny, and live out in fealty what we have learnt at His feet, for in that sign we shall conquer.

XIX

THE SECRET OF THE LORD

" His secret is with the upright."—PROV. iii. 32.

THE newspapers without exception have been allotting a generous amount of their space to the British Association meetings held at Dundee—our national Parliament of Science, affording an annual survey of the progress of physical knowledge, and giving even to the non-scientific reader some idea of the directions in which that progress is being achieved, with a glimpse of the latest scientific discoveries, experiments and speculations. There is something very fine and inspiring in this yearly demonstration of so much strenuous, concentrated effort to push back the frontiers of ignorance, to find out the working of nature's laws, to grapple with her mysteries; the patience, the industry, the skill, the mingled caution and boldness of these highly-trained intellects, their sole and single desire for truth—all these are worthy of our sincerest admiration. And this year the gatherings have been more interesting than usual from the general public's point of view because of some of the issues treated, issues that arouse the attention or curiosity of the non-specialist, the man in the street: the secret of life's origin, the secret of man's antiquity, the secret of the antarctic ice—all these have formed the subjects of important addresses and of much subsequent

discussion. Has living substance simply evolved out of non-living substance by chemical processes, which perhaps we shall be able presently to repeat at will? Has man been on this globe for a million years or so? What is the net contribution to knowledge of Captain Scott's perilous journey to the South Pole? To each of these questions in turn we have been eagerly listening for answers, and the echoes of the Dundee meetings will be heard for many a day to come.

Yes, it is no wonder that the great public is keenly interested in these secrets; and yet this very eagerness made one reflect a little wistfully. Would there be anything like the same interest displayed, were some great expert or specialist along quite another line to make a pronouncement upon quite another secret—the secret of the Lord? Does such a phrase as this at all appeal, or convey a meaning, to the average modern mind? Does that mind so much as trouble itself to inquire what that secret may be? I am afraid that, broadly speaking, only one answer to these questions is possible: the newspapers, knowing what their public wants, would dismiss the matter either unreported or with twenty lines of small type pushed away in some inconspicuous corner; the matter would be judged by our editors of particular rather than general interest—and the worst of it is they would be right. To the great mass of readers the secret of the Lord is only a form of words, a form to which they attach hardly any content; they will talk with animation, even if without much understanding, about Professor Schäfer's "hormones" and "colloidal compounds," but to this other secret they are not even anxious to find the key.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not so foolish as to complain of the interest in the facts, or even the theories, of physical science ; what I do regret is that that interest should be so one-sided, that so many minds nowadays should be so exclusively preoccupied with the seen and tangible as to have practically no room for spiritual facts and values. That, assuredly, is not a good sign of the times ; it means that in our breathless age we have been captivated by material phenomena—that " things are in the saddle and ride mankind," shutting out from our field of vision the deeper and more enduring realities of religion. The age readily flatters itself that it is too practical to bother its head about the unseen, which is supposed to have no market-value anyhow : well, it may be useful to point out that in the most practical book of the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs, the supremacy and moral governance of God are always assumed, and that that very book, in the midst of all kinds of directions for the conduct of life, refers in the most natural manner to this very thing, the secret of the Lord.

How, indeed, except by the most colossal superficiality, are we to keep that thought out of even our most advanced physical speculations ? Assuming Professor Schäfer's much-debated thesis to stand the test of further inquiry and experiment—assuming, that is to say, that the wonder and the potency of life are inherent in simple chemical substances—does not that render so much the more marvellous the Divine Wisdom which endowed those substances with such possibilities, evolving in the course of the æons what was involved from the very beginning ? You do not abolish the Creator by making the method of

creation more wonderful ; you deepen the great secret —you do not declare it to be non-existent.

The profoundest minds of the race have always bowed in humility before the secret of the Lord—bowed before it, and yet spoken of it as a secret that might be read. That seems a contradiction at the first glance, and a piece of presumption to boot ; do we not remember the prophet's, " Who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, that he should perceive and hear His word ? " Do we not recall that other query, " Canst thou by searching find out God ? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ? It is high as heaven—what canst thou do ? Deeper than the grave—what canst thou know ? " How little, for the matter of that, do we know even of our own, inner secret life, not to speak of that of others, including our very nearest ? How much is there in ourselves that we never suspect, until perhaps some great moral or spiritual upheaval brings it to the surface ? We know neither the best nor—mercifully—the worst of ourselves : given certain stimuli, which have not happened to come our way, and we might have risen to heights or sunk to depths we never dreamed of ! Occasionally, indeed, under the stress of some great emotion, we all have had glimpses of ourselves which have surprised and may have terrified us ; as Rochefoucauld has it, " A man at some times differs as much from himself as he does from other people." In looking back upon such a time we ask ourselves incredulously, " Was it indeed I who felt or acted like that ? "—which only proves how far we are from having exhausted even our own individual secrets and possibilities.

And with so much in our own natures to perplex and

elude us, we must be strangely constituted if we think we can truly read the secrets of our fellows. This is part of the pathos of existence—that "loneliness of life" of which we spoke in an earlier sermon—that between the closest friends, the most intimate associates, there should be so much that must perforce remain untold, because we have no means of telling or understanding. Friends and lovers, wives and husbands, parents and children, we remain to each other to the end of the chapter books a few pages of which we have glanced at, while the rest are closely sealed :—

> Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing ;
> Only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness,
> So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another ;
> Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and silence.

How much less, we conclude, since we fail to fathom even the comparatively shallow deeps within ourselves and each other, can we presume to cast our plumb-line so as to understand the secret of the Lord ? "Who among men," asks the Apostle, "knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him ? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God."

What then ? Are we shut up to a mere profession of ignorance, a kind of reverent agnosticism ? The fact is, we cannot resign ourselves to such a condition ; the heart of man, when it is tired of its materialism and arid pursuit of the things of sense, instinctively craves for a more assured knowledge of God, and experience bears its testimony that this craving is not in vain. In the beautiful phrase of the Latin saint, God has made

us unto Himself, and our heart is restless till it rests in Him. How, then, do we obtain the soul-satisfying knowledge of Him which we need, and what is the secret of which we are instinctively in search?

Let it be clearly understood in the first place that this knowledge of God does not come by way of the intellect, of learning, of study; it is not the prize of brilliant powers of reasoning, or withheld from those who cannot claim such. One may on the intellectual side possess the clearest and most convincing proofs of God's existence, and yet envy some poor, unlettered saint or unspoiled child their assurance of Him—an assurance which owes nothing to arguments. Let us remember that pride of intellect, contempt for the unlearned multitude, was one of the worst and most unlovely traits of Pharisaism. One of the strongest objections to a system like Mrs. Besant's theosophy is that it takes such a lot of understanding—it is not for simple, workaday folk, whose religion must be such that he who runs may read. Here our Lord and His greatest Apostle are at one: "I thank thee, O Father, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight." "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world in its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."

What then is the better way, and how do we come to gain a true insight into God and His purposes? The answer is simple enough, and escapes us, alas, on

account of its very simplicity, because we are on the look-out for something difficult and elaborate: "His secret," says the writer of Proverbs, "is with the upright"—just as the Psalmist tells us that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." Put yourself into the right attitude, and God will become for you the all-illuminating Reality, in whose light you will see light. And this right attitude is none other than that of teachableness, of entire submission, of willing and steadfast obedience. This attitude of the soul is very much the same—and it was Huxley of all men who pointed out the analogy—as that of the scientist towards nature. "Science," he wrote, "seems to me to teach, in the highest and strongest manner, the great truth which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the will of God. Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing." Yes, and unless we order ourselves before God as children, following humbly wherever His voice leads, ready all the time to be taught, to conform our wills to His Will, we shall learn nothing.

"His secret is with the upright." Personally, I am convinced that a great deal of the modern uncertainty concerning God is far less due to the head than to the heart, it is not nearly so much the result of imperfect reasoning as of imperfect practice. The trouble at the root of a large proportion of the doubt we hear so much of is not mental but moral; nor is such a result surprising. The enormous shadow cast by self obscures the vision of God. Let us look at things as they are, and at life as it is, and we shall

admit that there are many modes of existence, many dispositions of the human will, that are in themselves insuperable obstacles to faith. In many instances it is not so much a case of men being honestly *unable* to believe, but rather of their being secretly *unwilling* to believe in a Deity whose very existence, once acknowledged, would be a rebuke to their manner of living, and a prospect of requital to come. I can see many reasons why the exploiter of his fellows, the gambler, the hard self-seeker, should in their hearts prefer to think that there was no God to whom they must render an account of their doings, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity unmoved. Yes, nine times out of ten, to-day as of yore, it is in the heart rather than in the brain that men say, "There is no God;" and this very illusion, this failure to perceive Him, is the first punishment that overtakes them.

Let me give you a case in point—and if it is taken from literature, it is none the less true to life. In that powerful modern play, "Hindle Wakes," Mr. Stanley Houghton portrays for us a character at once sullen and pleasure-loving, utterly self-willed and self-centred; and when her father tells her that something is as certain as that there is a God in heaven, she immediately retorts, "Well, *that's* not so certain, after all!" It is a tremendously self-revealing touch, showing the author's extraordinary insight: to the wilful and undisciplined, the slaves of their ill-regulated desires, it is always doubtful whether there is a Supreme Ruler, whose Will cannot be flouted with impunity; and they give themselves the benefit of that doubt—or rather, of that vain and delusive hope.

"But His secret is with the upright." Now we are

beginning to understand. There is in us a faculty which, *provided we use it*, discloses to us directly the being and nature of the Most High, because it makes us realise our relatedness to Him. We have but to do His will—to follow the dictates of absolute right speaking in us and to us—in order to read His secret. Every one has heard the story Theodore Parker tells of his own childhood, how he was in the act of wantonly injuring a harmless tortoise when he grew distinctly conscious of a voice saying, "You must not;" how he ran to his mother, greatly agitated, asking her what might be the meaning; and how she replied, "People call it conscience, but its better name is the Voice of God; the more you listen to it, the more clearly will it speak." When we submit to an absolute law and authority, not from prudential reasons, not after weighing advantages and disadvantages, but because *this* is right and *that* would be wrong, we become conscious of an Absolute Lawgiver, and that in a way which is quite independent of argument, nor to be shaken by the reasonings of scepticism. The authority is so strong, it speaks so decisively, that we know it to be that of a personal God; unperceived by outer sense, His secret presence becomes overwhelmingly real to those who order themselves according to His commands, and that is their first and immediate reward. They will not "find out the Almighty unto perfection," they will not penetrate all the mysteries of the Infinite One, but they will have an assurance no doubt can shake, an assurance of the highest practical value in "the stern business of living aright."

We all know what such an inner certainty will do for those who possess it—we know it, if only because at

times we have all suffered through the lack of it. As a modern writer has it, "There are a few strong souls who can keep their moral natures tautly braced up by sheer energy of will; but for common folk it is only the reinforcement which the thought of God constantly impinging upon their consciousness brings, that can keep the distinction between right and wrong clear and imperative." It is an immense help and an immense incentive to know that we are on the side of One who has the last word, whose Will must prevail; with that consciousness, a man is no longer floundering in a moral quagmire or shifting sand, but his feet are on the rock, and he can face difficulties and remain unmoved by soft allurements or angry threats, because he knows in whom he has believed—he has read the secret of the Lord—His "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not—" clearly revealed to him in his own experience.

No man can put into words the enormous difference the possession of this secret makes, and that not only in the great crises, but in the every-day of life, with its jolts and jars, its thousand and one besetments. It is to have the mariner's compass, which enables us to steer a straight course, sure that if we keep to it we shall not miss our goal. It is to verify the triumphant words of the Psalmist, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day. Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation: there shall no evil befall thee." For presently a further insight is granted to the faithful servant of the Voice of God; he knows that the Will he obeys is not only supreme, but that it is good, and designed for our

happiness; he feels a satisfaction in his allegiance, even when it involves sacrifice and hardship, which does not come from self-will and self-pleasing. That is one reason why our Saviour says that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light—the load is lightened, the yoke is eased, the monotony of daily duty is transfigured, resistance to the pressure of uncongenial environment becomes possible, in the consciousness of God's approval, the knowledge that He "stands within the shadow keeping watch above His own." As John Wesley exclaimed amid all the strain and harassment of his immense and arduous labours, "And the best of all is, God is with us." His soul had read the secret of the Lord aright; and so, by God's grace, may we, if we will.

And there is more than this. In every life there is sorrow, there are visitations of suffering, dark seasons of grief that tax all our powers of endurance and fortitude. Where is the materialist, the unbeliever, in those vicissitudes? So far as he is concerned, there is no explanation, no consolation, no refuge. At a recent gathering of "rationalists" Sir Ray Lankester said they ought to sing verses like the following of Swinburne's:—

> Great Chance, to thee I give the praise,
> And not to God, as others do,
> That I was born an Atheist child,
> And not a Christian or a Jew.

But even "rationalists" do not sing such dismal rubbish; while the devout believer, of whatever name, has songs in the night, and in submitting himself to the Will of God, receives an illumination and a peace not of this world, which enable him to stand up under his trials, and to see in his very afflictions part

of the hidden purpose of God, which he can trust even while he is unable to spell it out. He may be pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed. How often have I heard some afflicted saint testify under the weight of adversity after this fashion, "The Lord always says, 'Not more than you can bear.'" That is the secret to which unbelief has not the key; the servant of God has meat to eat that the world knows not of; and for such a blessed assurance, as Burns has it—

> An atheist's laugh's a poor exchange.

One last secret let me allude to, for I have not time for more than an allusion to what is nevertheless a subject of the utmost importance to us all: it is God's infinite readiness to forgive us what we have done amiss, if we resolutely turn our back upon the parched plain of self-will, and arise to go to our Father; there is no "Too late" with Him, no cold or hostile "Thou canst not enter here"; the Divine affection we have scorned is still unwearied—

> His everlasting grace
> Our scanty thought surpasses far;
> He shows paternal tenderness,
> His arms of love still open are.

That truth He has revealed to us, fully and finally, in the Person and Gospel, in the life and death, of Jesus Christ, who is the Answer to all our questions, the Light that scatters all our doubts, the very Image of the Father's Substance. Looking unto Him, heeding His call, believing His promises, we are no more uncertain or desolate; for we have seen Immanuel, God with us, and know henceforth that God is Love.

XX

THE KEEPING OF THE HEART

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."—PROV. iv. 23.

HERE is one of the most familiar exhortations handed down to us by the sages of the Old Testament, a saying worn so smooth by continual repetition that its meaning—like the inscription on some old coin that has passed from hand to hand—has become slightly dim with overmuch handling; shall we make an effort this morning to read it anew, and see what it has to say to us?

I

Reason and impulse, thought and feeling, the head and the heart—these are the two rival claimants to whom we all feel drawn by turns, and who between them rule the affairs of mankind. Very much "between them" at times, for in practice they are often antagonistic forces, now the one and now the other uppermost, much like two great political parties seizing the reins of government in turns, each animated by different ideals, and embodying them in different policies and enactments. Which of these forces, then, has the better claim to our allegiance; or, to put the question as religious people must put it, what is God's will and ordinance for us in this matter, which must affect the whole of our lives? Day by day we see men

swayed by either their heads or their hearts, if not exclusively, yet predominantly. One man throws himself readily and even vehemently into any and every movement which claims to redress some supposed wrong, and often, alas, the old saying applies to him—"unstable as water, he does not excel": his sympathy, quite sincere at the time, has a way of spending itself in space, until the next "cause" or piece of knight-errantry comes along to sweep him in its wake. Another will ask for far more information, suspects that there are rights and wrongs on both sides, and through sheer caution and love of balancing frequently becomes an ineffective figure in the conflict of life, one of those occupants of a non-committal seat on the cross-benches, who are heartily disliked by both sides, because they prove useful to neither. The very makers of saws and maxims speak with a divided voice on the matter, for while one tells us to "look before we leap," the other declares emphatically that "he who hesitates is lost."

On which side, we ask again, should the Christian be found? It is an immensely important choice to make, *if we must make it;* the business of life, in any case, is too serious for us to drift blindly into this channel or that—we had better see what we are about, better consider each alternative on its merit, and then give our casting vote. Not to *let* things happen, but to *make* them happen, is what we are here for, while fatalism is at once the refuge and the nemesis of feebleness.

II

This is the point at which we turn to our text—"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are

the issues of life." Both parts of the saying, as we shall discover, are of equal importance; let us begin by looking at the second. The issues of life are *out of the heart;* that is a truth we cannot sufficiently bear in mind. There, in the emotional centre of our natures, is the dynamic which sets things moving, which generates life itself, as electricity is generated at the power-station. Let the heart beat sluggishly, intermittently, and all the activities of life slow down or are temporarily suspended. "Is thy heart right?" is the supreme question, on the answer to which all else will depend. Every movement that has blessed mankind springs from that source; let it dry up, and all the argument in the world is so much beating the air. Whether in religion or in affairs, the truth is the same. You cannot argue yourself into a living faith in God: unless your feelings are touched, the most cogent logical proofs will make no vital difference to you. You may be theoretically convinced of the entire reasonableness of some course, yet advance not an inch; then all of a sudden a spark of sentiment is kindled, and you are embarked upon the venture which all your merely intellectual approval brought no whit nearer realisation. As Lord Haldane reminded us the other day, nothing great is ever done without passion. For thirty years the Great Powers of Europe talk most reasonably to Turkey, politely impressing upon her the extreme desirability of carrying out her treaty obligations and ceasing from massacre—but the massacres continue, and Turkey feels quite safe in disregarding diplomatic representations, because there is no heart in them; then four small nations, weary of waiting for the reforms that never come, weary of silken, meaningless

parleyings, rise up in arms—and before three weeks have gone by, it has become clear to the meanest intelligence in any Foreign Office that the *status quo*, which condemned Turkey's Christian subjects to hopeless misery, is dead beyond resuscitation. Again —homeless children, crouching at night under archways, and drifting from physical into moral evil, had been a well-known feature of the metropolis for many years past, and little was done by way of remedy; but a young Irish medical man has his heart touched by these pitiful sights, and the result is Dr. Barnardo's Homes, with their ever-open door, and their record of fifty thousand children rescued from want, degradation, crime, premature death. That is the sense in which so great a poet and thinker as Goethe exclaims, "Feeling is everything; words"—abstract arguments—"are sound and smoke"; and again, "Unless ye *feel* it, ye will ne'er attain it!" The heart is of prime importance, because the issues of life are from it; to disregard that side of our nature as though it did not matter, is in reality to pronounce sentence of extinction upon ourselves.

What then? Are we to say, and does our text say, "Do whatever your heart, whatever your emotions, may prompt you to do, and follow no other voice; a fig for reason, that cold and soulless counsellor—make your impulses your oracles, and you cannot go wrong?" Alas, you can and will go frequently and deplorably wrong if you adopt that motto and act upon it; to erect our mere untested likes and dislikes into a norm either of judgment or of conduct is one of the quickest and least pleasant ways in which a man may come to grief. One could tell of one of the greatest journalists

of this generation who by his sheer incorrigible recklessness in yielding to impulse threw away by far the larger part of the influence he might have wielded, because it was recognised that his opinions—always sincere, and always pronounced with tremendous emphasis, in the manner of "Thus saith the Lord"—were too frequently coloured by strong feeling untempered by reflection. And what was true in this typical instance is as true, to the last syllable, in our private and individual lives. The world is full of people who have made shipwreck of their careers because the irresponsible dictates of their hearts, their emotions, represented to them the ultimate tribunal.

III

But what then is the meaning of those words, "*Keep* thy heart with all diligence?" Just because this is the vital energy, whose use or misuse affects our destinies no less than vitally, it requires to be "kept," *i.e.*, guided, wisely controlled, like any other force, which, left unguarded, will simply work mischief, exploding here, causing a fierce conflagration there, and leaving a heap of black ruins in the end. Precisely in view of the enormous possibilities for good and evil stored up in the heart, it is quite out of the question to leave those possibilities to develop without oversight and guidance; the heart has to be kept diligently, and its keeper is none other than the reason, irksome though its control and guardianship may be felt to be at times.

The heart is the seat of feeling, and without sentiency there can be no life; but without the restraint, the acknowledged authority, of mind which looks before and after, we shall too often be in danger of being

swayed by a desire to spare ourselves some disagreeable or painful feeling, purchasing some present, momentary gratification, some luxury of the emotions, all too dearly at the price of the consequences it entails. The heart, left to itself, protests against whatever is painful, and seeks to avoid it—it would rebel ever and anon against duty, discipline, restraint, because all these involve hardship incidentally ; but reason understands that the hardship is only incidental—that

> This is only sorrow
> For the day—

and thus enforces duty as against self-pleasing, discipline in preference to lawlessness, hard and persistent exertion in lieu of a lazy, lotus-eating existence. One has known of young lives spoilt and crushed by a lack of affection, or at least the outward signs of affection, in the environment in which they grew up ; but I am probably correct in saying that nowadays far more budding lives are spoilt by an atmosphere from which the more bracing elements have been eliminated, where the indulgent heart of the elders has been too much in evidence, and the head—not less anxiously, but more intelligently concerned for the child's welfare—too little. The heart, left to its own devices, is sometimes over-conservative, an obstacle to progress, sometimes ultra-revolutionary, despising law and order, a rudderless boat at the mercy of wind and waves, and more likely to land its cargo at the bottom of the sea than in port. In order that it may do its work, as God intended in framing it, we need to keep it with all diligence, with all thoughtful intelligence, so that the issue may be truly life, and not catastrophe.

IV

But if we may thus truly say that our text joins together two parts of our nature, each of which is woefully incomplete without the other, its complement, what follows ? My own conviction is that if, by obeying feeling without reason, we may sink below the human, on the other hand, by idolising reason without feeling, we may stray into the devilish. The imagination of past ages was not at fault in representing Satan as extremely intelligent, indeed, as an incarnate intelligence wholly devoid of love, of heart, of compassion. If you have read Mr. Wells's romance, "The War of the Worlds," you will remember the Martians as his fancy draws them—beings superbly equipped with reason, masters of the most perfect death-dealing appliances, utterly unmoved and pitiless in their use—and how, having descended to the earth, they calmly proceed to exterminate its hapless inhabitants by means of concentrated heat-rays. And they would have succeeded in their design and conquered the earth, but for one circumstance they had not foreseen—*they could not breathe the atmosphere of this planet*, and it proved fatal to them. Perhaps I am going beyond what Mr. Wells intended, in turning his story into allegory : but this seems to me the inner meaning of his fantasy—that mere intellect, unwarmed by love, is the deadliest, hatefullest, evillest thing in the world, but that it is unable to execute its plan of drying and scorching up human life and affection, because happily it cannot breathe the atmosphere of this earth, an atmosphere from which love and feeling cannot be eliminated. It is this cold, loveless spirit, reason unembarrassed by

emotion, which consigns unnumbered wretched animals to the vivisecting table ; just as it was the same spirit, laying all the emphasis upon the intellectual side of religion, upon creeds and dogmas, which lit the fires of the Inquisition. And the temper which is ready to persecute for opinion's sake, is not unknown even to-day ; but it is less and less able to breathe our air, the sweetness and light of the modern atmosphere are proving fatal to it, and some day perhaps the theological bigot will be reckoned among extinct monsters.

So much is certain—a merely intellectual consent has never saved a soul, as it has never fed the hungry, or dethroned a vested wrong. You must convince the heart, before the will is stirred to action. Rousseau prepared the way for the overthrow of the old *régime* in France, because he set the hearts of his readers throbbing with a sense of present injustice and glorious possibilities. Two generations later, in the days of Italy's struggle for liberty, it was not the brain of Cavour, arguing in terms of statesmanship, that could have won the goal by itself—no, nor the heart of Mazzini, who preached in terms of idealism, by itself—but the two in conjunction. And in our own day and country, what is chiefly lacking is the moral indignation and the moral enthusiasm of a Gladstone, who would never have consented to the strangling of a weak nationality like Persia, with Britain's connivance and consent. But in any case let us be well assured that until the heart has said its " I will," the declarations of the brain are empty sound, bloodless phantasms, signifying nothing.

V

Never forget, I beg of you, that there must be strong and deep feeling in every fruitful life. It is foolish and dangerous counsel which bids you beware of enthusiasm, and utters the word "sentiment" with a sneer. Only dead things, only dead souls, do not feel. We read of a certain brilliant and cynical prelate, that to him the greatest good in life was to be "amused," the greatest evil to be "bored." "His view of his fellow-men, and especially of Englishmen, was of the lowest. The 'heart of the English people' he described as 'the last place I should wish to be found in.'" He avowed that he never credited men with any ideals save "how to save sixpence, or gain sixpence, or escape from being robbed of sixpence." What an appalling philosophy! And in our commercial rush and hustle there are only too many influences at work to disparage the emotional side of our nature, to preach a dismal gospel of self-interest, allowing no scope for any enthusiasms that cannot show a dividend. Let me beg you not to think it unmanly—you will not think it unwomanly, nature has seen to that—to avow feeling, to own that you have hearts, and to acknowledge that your hearts have rights of their own. The one who rules out this factor in shaping life and conduct is a lost soul. He may escape many an ache and pang, but he will go to his grave without having known the glory of a passionate surrender to the things that are greater, and make us greater, than self—which is to say, he will die without ever having really lived. Believe me, we cannot afford to miss any opportunity for heart-culture; we should of set purpose kindle the torch of our

own finest emotions by the living fire which radiates from the great personalities that have made earth better by their presence, a Florence Nightingale, a David Livingstone, an Abraham Lincoln, and many others. It is one of the most disquieting features of the present day that great causes, unselfish ideals do not seem to appeal to the mass of men as they did in the middle of the nineteenth century—that despised middle-Victorian epoch which, with all its shortcomings, could sympathise with every nationality struggling for freedom, took Kossuth and Garibaldi to its heart, and loathed the very name of tyranny. Wordsworth's confession, "We are selfish men," is too true of this age; and as Mr. Zangwill once put it, selfishness is the only real atheism—unselfishness the only real religion.

VI

We must feel fervently if we are to achieve anything; but we must also feel rightly if we are to achieve things worth achieving. It is not enough to have the heart affirm with every beat that we must do right; we have also to find out what *is* right, and that is the function of the reason. As has been aptly observed, the oughtness of the ought is one thing, and the rightness of the right is another. The purest motives, unless they are guided and checked by right reason, may head us straight for disaster. We may be quite sure that such and such facts dictate to us one course, and one only: yes, but *are* they facts, and again, are they *all* the facts? We fancy, while we are young and inexperienced, that there is right and wrong clearly marked out on every occasion, just a plain black and white, impossible to be mistaken for each other, and nothing between the

two—until we discover that in practical affairs there seldom exists quite such a simple bifurcation ; that it is tragically easy to make mistakes ; and that again and again what we had taken to be high and eternal principles were only our preferences and prejudices dressed up in judicial scarlet and ermine hired cheaply for the occasion. I had a case of conscience submitted to me the other day : just one or two simple factors in a life had been dislocated by the acts of third persons, and the result was such a clash of apparently irreconcilable duties that anything one could say by way of counsel had to be of the most tentative and provisional character. The fact is that while we have an inborn sense of right and wrong, which is to be continually encouraged and cultivated, yet what under any given circumstances is right may be most difficult to discover, and can be discovered only by the faithful and diligent use of the reason ; and that task requires skill, patience, a dispassionate spirit, a strong intention of integrity—and in the end often a large margin of forbearance.

> One thing must still be greatly dark—
> The moving *why* they do it;
> And just as lamely can ye mark
> How far perhaps they rue it.

I cannot too earnestly warn you against the temptation of riding off on what we are pleased to call our intuitions, which too frequently only means that we are too impatient to gather and sift the facts, and prefer to abide by the verdict, not necessarily unbiassed, of our feelings. That way lie danger and injustice, and the terrible snare of self-righteousness. And as in private affairs, so in all reforming movements : not one

of these but is imperilled, its successes hampered, its final victory delayed, by the misdirected energy of ill-disciplined adherents whose hearts may be all right, but whose heads are unfortunately all wrong. Not a reform which does not suffer for the "shock tactics" of unbalanced extremists, especially when they mistake tantrums for testimony, and heroics for heroism.

VII

A word, and a word only, on this subject—the keeping of the heart—in relation to religion. In this domain above all the heart must speak, the feelings must be stirred, the will be set in motion, or all our confessions of faith will be so much barren dialectics and dreary intellectual pastime. *The heart must speak*: such a cry as, "He loved me, and gave Himself up for me," is worth volumes of argument. Nevertheless here too the heart's activity needs to be balanced by the head's, in order that emotion, bereft of control, may not spend itself in excess, may not hinder the progress of truth, may not decline to acknowledge God's growing revelation, may not obstinately refuse to live in the present, content to bury itself in the past. A religion which should decline the verdicts of reason in its own legitimate province—say, the discoveries of modern science, or the scholarly criticism of the Bible—such a religion, I say, would sink into credulity, and for credulity the coming age will have less and less use. Let us do all we can to prevent religion being affected by heart-disease—tremors, painful contractions, degeneration. There is no need for panic; truth is never hurtful; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Faith has nothing to fear

from reason, or religion from science, or reverence from criticism, or the heart from the head; they are allies in the perfecting of mankind, wedded partners, not identical in function, but meant for mutual help, and to work harmoniously together for the same great end. Let us keep our hearts with all diligence; and may the spirit of Christ so sanctify and possess us that it may be ours to help on that better day when

> Mind and heart, according well,
> Shall make one music as before,
> But vaster!

XXI

THE SEEDS OF DISCORD

"For lack of wood the fire goeth out; and where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth."—PROV. xxvi. 20. (Compare also vi. 16–19.)

I

HAVE you ever, in looking at the closing paragraphs of Paul's letters, felt any passing curiosity in regard to the names you find mentioned there as belonging to friends and acquaintances and fellow-workers of the great Apostle's? Mere names to us, they were those of men and women dear to Paul, people whom he deemed worth remembering in the very epistles in which he poured out the treasures of his mind and heart. One could weave romances round that oddly-named pair, Tryphæna and Tryphosa—were they sisters, I wonder?—who laboured in the Lord; about Demas and Luke, the beloved physician, who send their greeting to the friends in Colosse; about Trophimus, left sick in Miletus, and many another: but I own I have always felt a special interest in two of these friends of Paul's, mentioned in his letter to the Philippians, namely, Euodia and Syntyche—perhaps because in their case the veil is lifted ever so little: "I exhort Euodia and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, for they laboured with me in the Gospel." It

is very touching and human, the Apostle in his Roman captivity thinking of these fellow-workers of his in Philippi, having heard that all is not well between them, anxious for their reconciliation, and invoking the services of a peacemaker to help them bridge over the estrangement—a delicate and far from easy duty entrusted to that unnamed yoke-fellow! How one wonders whether these efforts were successful, whether Euodia and Syntyche made up their quarrel, and whether Paul had the satisfaction of learning, before he met his death, that his appeal had been heeded; how enlightening, too, it would have been to learn how exactly these two workers in the same cause came to be at cross-purposes with one another, and what it was that caused the little rift within the lute that by and by did make the music mute! "O love of those first Christian days!" we read—yea, doubtless: but there were the same weaknesses of human nature, too, the same wrong-headedness and self-importance and touchiness, you may be quite certain, in that far-off age as in our own, and these said charming qualities found scope and played havoc in the internal working of the Christian Church in the first century, as they still do in that of the twentieth—witness Euodia and Syntyche, not on speaking terms.

What was the matter with these two dear, absurd, impossible people, that they should be at daggers drawn, each with a sense of grievance against the other even while professing loyalty to the same Lord? We can only make surmises. Likely enough it had all begun with Syntyche fancying that Euodia got more than her share of commendation from Paul for work in which she, Syntyche, had been at least equally con-

spicuous; or Euodia had observed that Syntyche was "giving herself airs" as if nothing in that Church could be done or left undone without her sanction and authority; or they had disagreed about the very gift the Church sent to the captive Apostle, each claiming to know better than the other what Paul was likely to want and appreciate! No harm—no real harm—in either of them: only the grievous harm that came out of all this foolish rivalry, the stone of stumbling it proved to the whole little community at Philippi, the bitterness of spirit it occasioned! And yet the difference between these two, it may be safely asserted, need never have assumed the painful proportions it evidently did—nay, the wound to injured vanity and self-love might in time have closed of itself—if it had not been for one external cause, viz., the very unnecessary interest taken in the matter by those whom it did not concern. It was the sympathisers, *i.e.*, the people who called themselves so, that did the mischief, that allowed neither of the two to forget their grievance, until it had become a standing sore, an offence that reached and saddened the Apostle all the way from Eastern Macedonia across to Italy!

II

This is a subject to which the Book of Proverbs returns again and again; and the very multitude of the maxims referring to the sowers of discord, the stirrers-up of strife, shows the deplorable frequency of the phenomenon itself, as well as its seriousness. Every other person or so suffers, we know, at times from an exaggerated readiness to see and take offence, to magnify slights that at most *are* "slight" in them-

selves, and often exist in the imagination only—here is a fruitful cause of many feuds. And again, who has not known distressing and seemingly inexplicable cases of alienation between fast friends, indifference taking the place of former intimacy and affection, leaving one of the parties hopelessly puzzled and at a loss to explain what has happened? You remember those pathetic lines of Browning's:—

> Was it something said,
> Something done,
> Vexed him? Was it touch of hand,
> Turn of head?
> Strange! that very way
> Love begun:
> I as little understand
> Love's decay.

All this is saddening and perplexing enough: but it is all rendered infinitely worse by the gratuitous and mischievous intervention of the tale-bearer and busy-body, keeping the injury alive and inflamed, and in time poisoning it by his incessant ill-directed activity. It is not for nothing that the ancient writer whose words we have been reading together (Prov. vi., 16—19), is so tremendously emphatic in his condemnation: of the seven deadly evils which he declares to be an abomination to the Lord, he places last of all—so that the idea may remain well fixed in the mind of the reader—the one that soweth discord among brethren. Such, he says, are abhorred by God; we may add, they should be abhorred by men and women likewise, as real dangers and enemies of society.

There is only one justification for devoting a sermon to such a subject: we need to be warned and on our guard against this type, since we have to encounter it

in the everyday of life. May we not say, too, in all humility, that this is a case of "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"? No one sets out purposely to develop the unlovely characteristics of the sower of discord, and most people would resist the first beginnings, did they but realise at the very start the immense harm done by the chatter and gossip of irresponsible rather than downright malicious people.

III

I am afraid it has to be admitted in the first place that there are unhappily-constituted persons who, wherever they go, become causes of friction in their environment, creating an atmosphere of mutual antagonism, disintegrating trust and concord. Follow their careers, and you will see that all along they have left a track of wreckage behind them; if they connect themselves with an institution, you may bid farewell to peace and efficiency in its working—somehow, sooner or later, after an accumulation of inflammable material, there will be explosion and disaster. It comes natural to them to fan discontents, to foster a spirit of faction, to bring about an outbreak of ill-feeling where previously all was amity. They assure you with all earnestness that they are only making a stand for principle, that they mean well—which may be the case, only they always do so ill in the concrete sphere of results. I think if there is one lot from which a man or woman may pray to be preserved, it is that of becoming a habitual wrecker; and what I would suggest is precisely this—that prayer *will* preserve us from this as from other evils. For in praying we gain self-mastery, we are led to take a humbler estimate of ourselves, and

in submitting ourselves to the Divine influence, we are healed of that bleakness and arrogance of spirit which must have its own way and sets all others at nought. To sanctify our will in contact with God is to have the hard crust of self-righteousness and self-will melted, and to pass from death to life in a true sense of sympathy with our fellows; the force which otherwise would have been used only to devastate peace and stir up strife will be directed into a happier channel of goodwill and constructiveness. "Oh, but people cannot change their temperaments like that," it is urged. *Like what?* Suddenly, by just wishing they were different? Very likely not. But by bringing themselves under the discipline of the religion they profess, by living as if it were true, people can effect, and have effected, enormous changes—amounting to transformations—in themselves, changes of which John Bunyan, the erstwhile cursing, swearing tinker become a sober and saintly preacher of the Gospel, is but typical. Those who say that it is impossible to overcome temperament leave out of their reckoning the one way which makes overcoming possible; *that* is "the mystery of godliness"—the godliness which is great gain. And the disposition of which we have been speaking, to cause contention and break up unity, instead of being indulged, may be overcome in the same manner—by linking on our feebleness to God's prevailing strength, and merging our turbulence in His abiding peace.

IV

I need say very little about another and darker variety of the sower of discord—the man or woman who takes a perverted pleasure in causing trouble, in giving

pain and disturbing happy relations ; alas, such people exist, and it is no good shutting our eyes to their existence. The most charitable thing is to attribute their malice, their delight in separating chief friends, to a species of moral insanity ; they themselves are possibly thwarted, disappointed beings, and the sight of other folks' happiness and concord seems to provoke them to a kind of fury—here is something they must destroy. One has known such individuals go about in the most cold-blooded fashion setting friend against friend, undermining a sound reputation, dropping poisoned hints in the most systematic manner, and with a diabolical ingenuity which produced its fatal impression not so much by what was spoken as by the manner in which it was said. Such as these are the very artificers of hell, and their handiwork is to be seen in broken hearts, and sundered bonds, and blighted lives ; all we can say of these perverts, after making the excuse of moral insanity for them, is that individuals and society alike have the right and even the duty to protect themselves by the most drastic measures against those who go about with the poison of asps under their lips. To allow this species of leprosy to spread unchecked is misplaced charity. The means to be taken will vary with each case, but in sheer self-defence loose-lipped malice must be fought, wherever the opportunity presents itself, with entire ruthlessness, as a loathsome thing which cannot be mended, but has to be exterminated like some venomous reptile.

V

But the greater part of the discord due to tale-bearing is caused, I feel assured, not by malevolent intention

so much as by frivolity, small-mindedness and light-mindedness; tittle-tattle is the special sin of idle minds, irresponsible people, talking over their neighbours' business for want of something better to do. There are those who take a special pride in knowing all about everybody else's affairs—and what they do not know they surmise, and the gaps in their knowledge they fill up by imaginative methods, in a manner highly satisfactory to themselves, if not quite so pleasing to their victims. They have special sources of misinformation, and are ready with intimate details to anybody's disadvantage. Being untroubled with any sense of accuracy—being, indeed, unable to repeat anything they have seen or heard in an accurate manner—they are the more voluble and circumstantial in their narratives, which, since they are about real people, always have a certain *air* of reality. Give them an atom of fact, no larger than a grain of mustard seed, and like that grain it will grow into a tree—I should say a medlar-tree, because its fruit, the medlar, is rotten before it is ripe. Every public man has suffered from mythical accounts of his doings glibly circulated by people of this description, constitutionally inexact and of the most limited intelligence, not so much actuated by positive ill-will as because that is the simplest way for rather dull persons to be interesting. Every tyro journalist in Christiania, Mr. Gosse tells us, knew that there was a public only too eager for gossipy paragraphs about Ibsen—and paragraphs were manufactured galore, often of a nature most wounding to the poet's devoted wife. And there were always those who made it their business to foment quarrels between Ibsen and his greatest literary compeer in Norway, Bjoernson,

repeating some chance remark of the one to the other, and twisting it in repetition, with disastrous effects on their relations ; and, of course, these retailers of tittle-tattle always appeared—they always do appear—in the guise of sympathisers, and invariably either with half a tale or with a tale-and-a-half. That is one feature to which I have already alluded, and of which one sees instances every now and then : the downright mischief caused by the "sympathetic" busybodies whose whispered inaccuracies blow the dying embers of a feud into renewed flame, telling A. how badly he has been treated in that matter by B., that everybody thinks so, too, and that surely the last has not been heard of the business yet ! No, and the last never *will* be heard of it while this sort of comforter goes about making trouble. But "where there is no tale-bearer, contention ceaseth."

The root of the evil, in the majority of cases, is just that mental vacuity and barrenness which has no interests beyond the most trivial, which cares only for personalities and not for ideas, never gets beneath the surface of anything, and finds its congenial pabulum in the ineffable pettinesses of this scandal and that dispute. Once more, this kind of thing would be beneath notice, beneath contempt even, but for its grievous consequences. I have only just recently read an amazingly brilliant sketch by a French writer, simply called "*Le Potin*"—"Gossip"—showing in the compass of half-a-dozen pages how the chatter of a brainless nonentity, just a vapid so-called man of the world, repeated without definite malice, but solely in order to show that he is "in the know" of what is going on—how this, I say, drives a strong man, worth a dozen of him, to his death,

and brings catastrophe upon two other upright and loyal natures. Of course it takes a skilled artist to bring the facts out with such startling and overwhelming effect; but when I had come to the end of that miniature masterpiece I felt that I understood better than ever in my life why Jesus Christ, with His great leniency towards some forms of human frailty, exclaims so sternly and warningly, "I say unto you that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." What if this particular purveyor of scandal pleaded never so passionately that he had meant no harm, that he was only amusing himself and a knot of other idlers by repeating current insinuations in a slightly more positive form than usual—that could not bring his victim to life again, or undo the calamity he had so carelessly brought about. You remember Stevenson's indignant lines:—

> I am "the smiler with the knife,"
> The battener upon garbage I:
> Dear Heaven, with such a rancid life,
> Were it not better far to die?

"For every idle word"—there is no escaping the responsibility we incur in ill-considered speech.

> "Careful with fire" is good advice, we know;
> "Careful with words" is ten times better so;
> Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
> *But God Himself can't kill them when they're said.*

VI

The cause of idle words is an idle mind; and the cure for an idle mind is to give it healthy employment. The busybody and scandalmonger is the person who

has not quite enough to do; he won't mind his own business because he has no business of his own to mind. For most of our minor vices and disorders—and I would add for most of our major ones as well—plenty of work, keeping us fully occupied, is the patent remedy. In that charming book, "The Lady of the Decoration," the writer explains why she does so many things at that Japanese Mission Station that are against the grain, in spite of her home-sickness and heart-sickness: "You ask me *why* I do these things. Well, you see it's all just like a big workshop, where everybody is working hard and cheerfully, and yet there is so much work waiting to be done that you don't stop to ask whether you like it or not." And you feel very certain, as you read her account, that they were far too full up with urgent duties to find time for squabbling or for stirring up strife by ill-natured gossip. We should be ashamed not to have anything better to occupy us than this private feud or that petty wrangle; we should find the world too full of matters that make wholesome calls upon our energies to waste them in the poor business of tittle-tattling; we should be too proud to let it be thought that we are so devoid of aim as to centre our interest in other people's disputes, far less take a share in promoting them, or adding fuel to the flames. And if anybody thinks it is difficult to be too busy to bother about the trivial and unprofitable, a simple trial would convince him to the contrary. It is not merely a case of "The Lord *will* provide." For everyone who likes to make the experiment God has provided so much that will worthily interest him, so much that is glorious in life and literature, so many opportunities of showing kindliness and help to those in need of it, as will suffice

to fill up all waking hours and overflow into his dreams. In a community of reasonably busy people the whisperer's occupation would be gone; he would find no listeners to his tales, no purchasers for his undesirable wares, and thus much of what is ugliest in social life and intercourse would cease of its own accord—the flame of strife would die down for want of being fed.

Work is one safeguard; humility is another—a sense of our limitations, the feeling, borne out by all experience, that we are not likely to know all the circumstances in this or that conflict, and are not really required to take sides or pronounce sentence. We never *quite* know how this or that thing happened, how this or that word was spoken, and our partisanship, however honest, will in all probability be based on partial knowledge, and do good to no one. We are not qualified, nor, happily, called upon, to intervene in every difference, even in the circle of our acquaintances; it is not mere prudence, but a humble consciousness of limited wisdom and powers, that led Browning to exclaim:—

> 'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
> And matter enough to save one's own.

Playing with souls, sowing and stirring up discord, may exercise a fascination over some; but it will be our wisdom to resist it.

But in the last resort, every problem of conduct is a religious problem, and its ultimate solution must be a religious solution. Work and humility will carry us some way in the right direction; but the

spirit we need for the ending of strife and contention is none other than that which rejoiceth not in iniquity, to wit, the spirit of love. "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all transgression." You may remember my explaining on an earlier occasion that this "covering" of transgressions does not mean condoning wrong; it is rather the temper and disposition which overcomes evil with good, and so blots it out. It is leagues removed from the censoriousness of a Pharisaism which is bitterly exultant at having another reputation at its mercy to flay and expose; it will many a time keep silence rather than indulge in speech where speech can cause only pain; it will seek to heal, not hurt; to save, not to destroy; to vanquish sin, but so as to redeem the sinner. It is the spirit which, speaking truth in love, leads those whom it possesses to grow up in all things into Him who is the Head, even Christ; from whom all the body, no longer rent by strife and divisions, but fitly framed and knit together, derives its power and grows in harmony and concord "unto the building up of itself in love."

XXII

THE HARVEST OF THOUGHT

"As he thinketh in his heart, so is he."—PROV. xxiii. 7.

THERE has been of late a lively controversy—a by-product of the abnormal summer, cold and wet, through which we have been passing—on the subject of Harvest Festivals. It has been contended that, with vast areas of agricultural land under water, after the bitter disappointment of a season which for many farmers will mean dire difficulties, if not actual ruin, it would be nothing less than mockery to give thanks for a harvest unreaped and ungarnered. One has seen calculations, according to which the loss caused by the rains and floods will come to the sum of seven millions sterling—no time for rejoicing, surely, to the unhappy losers. The one cause for great and real gratitude is that England happily depends far less upon her own harvests than upon those of the world, and while seventy years ago such a disaster would have meant months of starvation for the labouring multitudes, there has actually been, even in such a year of agricultural calamity, a general fall in the price of foodstuffs during August. For that we may indeed give thanks to God, and especially on behalf of the vast numbers whose means are so slender, and who have to make the weekly income go almost incredibly far; but if in those

districts which have suffered from the havoc of the rain there are fewer festivals and gaily decorated Churches this autumn, it will surely be no matter for either surprise or reproach.

But while one year may be good and another may be bad for the farmer, I am reminded that there is another process of sowing and reaping which is always going on, and knows no failure. It was from the life of the fields that Jesus habitually drew His most vivid similes when He wanted to drive home the moral and spiritual truths He taught. If we begin to quote instances from the Gospels, we shall find it difficult to stop; there is simply no end to these illustrations, allusions, parallels of His that are taken from this particular domain. Think of the parables of the sower, the wheat and the tares, of the fields white unto harvest, of the labourers in the vineyard, of the seed cast upon the earth and growing, man knoweth not how—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear—and many others; think of that searching question, "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" and of the evil tree bringing forth corrupt fruit. To this inexhaustible theme the Saviour returns again and again; of this line of comparison He never tires, likening what goes on in the minds and the lives of men to those processes and activities of nature which culminate, given normal circumstances, in harvest-tide.

Only one difference is there between the physical and the moral realm, but that a most significant one; in the latter there is no failure of crops, the results never fail to appear—they will neither be ignored nor changed at will; no magic can prevent the seed from bringing forth fruit after its kind, good or evil. "Things

are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived?" said old Bishop Butler. That is a sober doctrine, as simple and withal as complex as life itself—full of encouragement, full no less of warning; let us glance at it under both aspects for a moment.

I want to speak to you, my brother or sister, who may have come here this morning, with the sense of difficulties on your path very imperfectly banished or subdued, with a wistful doubt whether your efforts, your sacrifices really count—they seem to produce so little effect. You have sometimes felt inclined to echo Ecclesiastes of old, and to say, "What profit hath a man of all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun? . . . Then I looked on all the works that mine hands had wrought, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind. . . ." Well, the truth is not with Ecclesiastes. The universe does not cheat you like that. The harvest is always there, even if it is not in the precise spot where you are looking for it—that is determined by the all-wise Lord of the harvest. No right act done, maybe under severe difficulties, but makes right doing easier the next time, and issues in a righteous character; no tenderness or loving service, or sacrifice of self on the altar of duty, but ripens what is divinest in you; no faithful bearing of outer trial without inner triumph. And the self-denials, the industry, the stainless integrity practised by many a humble saint have been the most precious heritage of their children, bearing glorious fruit in after-years, rejoicing the hearts of the parents, whether on earth or in heaven. In the operation of God's law the harvest always ripens.

Always—whether we desire it or not. That is the other side of the account. No delusion so inveterate as that we can sow without reaping, reap without sowing, sow *this* and reap *that;* none which is so ruthlessly falsified by events. You can will an act, but you cannot un-will its effects. The universe does not cheat us, I said; but neither do we ever cheat the universe out of its dues. By no conceivable jugglery are we able to substitute one kind of character for another as the result of one kind of conduct, one kind of inclinations given rein to, one kind of tastes encouraged. You hear people say lightly enough that such and such an act is "of no consequence"; they might really as well say, while they are about it, that occasionally you can, by some sleight-of-hand, get twice two to make five—the one is as untrue as the other. There is no act that is "of no consequence," and sometimes a mere momentary swerve this way or that has made or marred a life. The thing really to bear in mind is that it is only the first step, as the French proverb has it, which costs us anything; the second is easier—and anyhow without the first there would not have been a second; and that is as true of the upward as of the downward path.

Now I have to own that the remark with which I began this sermon has taken me some little way out of the course I had marked out for myself originally—but not, I hope, altogether unprofitably. Let me, however, come to our immediate subject by asking you to look at the truth or truism I have been propounding, from the other side. What do I mean by looking at it from the other side? Just this: no act,

we said, without its consequence, no cause without its own, specific unalterable effect, an unbroken chain from first to last :—

> With Earth's first Clay they did the Last Man knead,
> And there of the first Harvest sowed the Seed ;
> And the first Morning of Creation wrote
> What the last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

Now invert that sequence, turn the process right round, and what do you get ? No effect without its cause, no harvest but is such by reason of the seed committed to the soil. And in the last resort take any event, take any act, take any character you like, trace its antecedents far enough back, and you will always and everywhere arrive at the same germ—a microscopic seed, maybe, but the origin of all that followed ; and that seed is just a *thought*. Nothing is put into execution but it has first existed as an idea. Long before a Peary has reached the goal of his adventurous voyage, he has been fascinated by the idea of the achievement : " for twenty-four years," as he told a London gathering, " sleeping or awake, to place the Stars and Stripes on the Pole had been my dream ; and now, awake or asleep, alone or in a crowd, I can face myself and say, ' I have made good.' " Long before Paul set sail for Europe, to carry the Gospel thither, his bold imagination had been captivated by the possibilities of such an enterprise, until in his very slumber he heard the mystic voice, " Come over and help us ! " Long before the caressing melody of the Barcarolle had come on waves of the air to woo you, it had been floating, a lovely, unembodied thing, on subtler waves of the composer's consciousness. Long before the statue stood forth gloriously in marble, the

sculptor had beheld it in a vision—and the vision was the reality; nay, the whole universe is built out of thought.

And so in the realm of character; a man's being is just the outcome of his thinking, his life is simply his thought made concrete; as the Authorised Version translates the phrase, "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." The Revisers no doubt have philology on their side to support their rendering, but the old translators have given us a saying that goes right to the heart of things. It is of this harvest of thought that I would speak to you this morning, and emphasise the enormous significance for life of the thoughts we allow to take root in the mind, and to spring up in the shape of corn or of weeds, of fragrant blossoms or of poison-plants, as the case may be. Thinking—straight and strong, vigorous and wholesome—is the theme to which I invite your attention.

And in the first place let us note that the importance of thought is apt to be habitually and mischievously underrated. The two most pathetic and most futile excuses one hears—and how frequently!—are, "I only thought," and "I did not think." *Only* thought, you notice, just as though thinking formed a mere negligible ingredient in the business of life, instead of being the germ-plasm of all action! And again, "I did not think"—how much grievous harm, how much inexcusable and irreparable wrong-doing, that stupid confession covers! But thinking is our prime responsibility, it is that for which we shall most certainly be brought into judgment. In a deep and real sense it *is* true that "nothing's good or bad but thinking makes it

so" ; that is to say that neither hero nor felon, neither egoist nor saint, neither martyr for right's sake nor traitor to truth, but has become such or such by letting in the first place his thoughts travel along certain lines, play with certain prospects, linger in certain places, and not in others.

May I then lay stress upon the urgent and, indeed, sacred duty of guarding and directing the thought which is the fashioner of life—the unseen craftsman whose chisel marks out the lineaments of the soul with a thousand deft and enduring strokes. There is no meanness as there is no devotion, no brave resistance to evil or weakly yielding to its threats or lures, that did not begin in the mind ; it is on that field that our battles are fought—that fortress which will be taken by hostile forces or victoriously beat them off, according to the calibre of the defending garrison. "The Prince of the World cometh," Christ is reported as saying "*and he findeth nothing in Me.*" That is the secret of triumph ; take care of the thoughts, we might vary the proverb, and the acts will take care of themselves. What goes on in that central department, the mind, will be telegraphed to the most outlying stations, and translated into practice. The great psychologist, Professor William James, condensed the whole matter into five words—"What holds attention, determines action." What fills the mind, springs up in deeds.

Well now, if it is a religious duty to use aright the faculties God has endowed us with, I wish very strongly to insist upon the religious side, the religious aspect, of this business of right thought ; and at the risk of seeming odd for a moment, I would in the first instance

put in a plea simply for the exercise of thinking, considered by and in itself. Does anyone say with a smile—"A plea for thinking? Why, that's what everybody is doing all the time!" But pardon me, everybody is doing nothing of the sort. You know the story—it appeared in *Punch*—of the squire's wife asking the old, retired farm labourer, "Well, Giles, what do you do with yourself now that you don't go out into the fields?"—and the old man answering, "Well, ma'am, sometimes I sits and thinks . . . and sometimes I just sits." That is true of many people who have not Giles's excuse! Real, steady, clear, unbiassed thinking is even comparatively rare. Letting the mind run all over the place without plan or direction, picking up this stray strand, playing with it for a moment or two, then tossing it aside for another which promises more entertainment, is not thinking at all; but it is woefully common. There is, it must be confessed, a terrible percentage of entirely frivolous, empty minds—minds which harbour no convictions, but only odds and ends of opinions picked up by sheer hazard and never tested; minds which I would compare to crazy-quilts, only that such a comparison would be an injustice to crazy-quilts, which at least have not a lot of ragged edges. The popular phrase is quite correct when it says that such people have no minds of their own, because they have never taken the requisite trouble; and you cannot build a worthy life without thinking steadily and seriously over at least a few elemental things—over what you imagine existence is for, what are the ultimate ends worth striving after, what are the ultimate laws to conform to. On the whole, I am afraid there is not really a great deal of

this kind of bed-rock thinking being done, and the result is seen in shallow lives for which no one is much the better. "As he thinketh in his heart, such is he"; but suppose he avoids thinking as far as possible, then *what* is he? Supposing he contents himself all his days with repeating what he has heard other people say, what happens then? By a natural process such people make quite instinctively for the views that give the least trouble to profess, because they are safe and conventional. We have a whole press which is specially written for non-thinkers, and to judge by its circulation, it must appeal to an enormous constituency. I do not know how you feel, but to me it always seems that persons of this type would do much less harm if they held no matter how erroneous views, but held them from conviction, as the outcome of real mental effort, a real attempt to see things as they are.

We want orderly thinking, and strong thinking, so that we may get strong and orderly lives, fit harvest of good seed. There is nothing more pitiful or foredoomed to tragedy than great truths held with a slack grasp. It is the old case of the soil having to co-operate if the grain is to grow and fructify. The seed which merely lies on the surface will be all too easily dislodged by gusts of fancy or floods of passion. And a great deal of current religion, it is to be feared, is only surface religion—not consciously insincere, but merely decorative, a kind of *appliqué* work not wrought into the real substance of our lives. No preacher but asks himself with a spasm of anxiety from time to time, Do his hearers really *think* of what he is trying to impress upon them, do his words ever echo in the chambers

of their hearts, do they bear some share in helping them to live, prove a support in moments of despondency, a stimulus to right doing, a comfort in dark seasons—or is it all forgotten the moment after the Benediction? If so, he is just an entertainer like other entertainers, and might be more usefully employed in doing a hand's-turn to help on the world's business! We do not think enough about our religion and its implications; if the thought were there, the practical effects would follow—they could not help following.

And thought, as I said, needs to be guarded and directed, just because it is so intangible and variable. There is a Latin saying which comes to my mind, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, "No one goes to perdition all at once"—and the fact is that the disintegration always begins by very slight, imperceptible stages in the twilight-region of the mind. A man starts thinking a little lightly of duty, a little loosely of sacred things, a little carelessly of right and wrong—above all, a little easily of excuses—and before long, unless the process is arrested with a strong hand, his whole atmosphere, yes, and the man himself, is changed. We talk about crooked characters sometimes; well, men become crooked characters through not thinking straight, or because if they face facts, it is with their eyes tightly shut.

In view of all that has been said, would it not be well and profitable if we each asked ourselves individually, What are the ideas we habitually cultivate? These thought-seeds, remember, are really nothing less than ourselves in the making, and to the extent that we control our thoughts, we control our future—

that is the absolute, literal truth. To the extent that we control our thoughts, we control our future; some would go farther, and say we control our present, and may, *e.g.*, in a considerable measure control our bodily health, but into that I do not enter. We all come in, I know, for many results, good and bad, of the actions of other people; but in the field of character, of manhood and womanhood, we reap that, and that only, which we have planted by thinking thus or thus. The butterfly-mind, which flutters from distraction to distraction, alighting now on this flower and now on that, but settles nowhere; the narrow and contracted —or coarsened and metallicised—mind which dreams of nothing but money and money's-worth; the darkened mind that is filled with envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness; the mind which by preference dwells upon the unlovely aspects of life, on its offal and garbage—all these mature their own ill-favoured fruit, fruit that turns to ashes in the mouth. And the mind which hopes and loves and trusts, which of set purpose turns to the sunnier side, which in striving after goodness, wrestling with its difficulties, giving and forgiving, fixes its glance upon the Son of God—its thoughts, too, issue in a life that is life indeed, and shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

"*Think on these things*"—such is the great Apostle's parting admonition to those whom he calls his beloved and longed-for, his joy and crown, given on a note of peculiar urgency; and no wiser or more practical advice has ever been tendered. We must give a definite direction to our minds—Godward and manward—lest they take one of their own, which we may

have cause to regret. The late Professor Max Müller prefixed to one of his volumes the motto "No thought without language, no language without thought"; we may adapt that and say, "No thought without resultant character, no character without preceding thought." Someone says, "But can we direct and control our ideas? The thoughts will come unbidden; can we help thinking so and so, or of such and such things?" The answer is, "We can, if we will." In Luther's pithy phrase, "We may not be able to prevent a bird from alighting on our heads, but we can prevent him from building his nest there." All thought lies at first on the surface, and, if we deem it unprofitable, can be blown away almost with a breath; it is the thoughts we welcome and cherish that take root and twine themselves round our very hearts till we cannot pull them out. It is the effort of a watchful will that is wanted: to quote that saying of William James once more, "What holds attention, determines action." "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he:" for good or ill, thought is the master-builder, and in thinking we make and mould that which in the end we become, we fore-shape and fore-order our destiny, we scatter that which we shall of a surety gather when harvest comes. Let us then set our hearts on the things that are above, for the quality of the mind's furnishing, the life lived out of sight, must inevitably translate itself into action, and bear its fruit in due season. And may we all seek more earnestly to have the mind in us which was in Christ Jesus, thinking His thoughts, obeying His laws, dwelling much upon His life, that by God's grace Christ may grow in us, and we into the likeness of the Holy One of God.

XXIII

THE PROBLEM OF PLEASURE

"He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich."—PROV. xxi. 17.

THE subject on which I wish to speak to you this morning is one on which there is to-day particular need of candid and careful thinking in the light of Christian principle. If there is one feature of the present day to which all social observers would point as outstanding and unmistakable, it is our growing preoccupation with, and absorption in, pleasure and amusements of every kind. One has not to be very old to remember quite distinctly a much simpler way of living, with far fewer distractions, more frugal habits prevailing in wellnigh every grade and class; and the question in regard to this, as to all, social changes is, "For better? For worse?" Are we improving or deteriorating; ought we to applaud the present tendency or to resist it? Is the love of pleasure at bottom sinful, and its indulgence injurious, or are we to recognise in it a legitimate instinct asking for its legitimate satisfaction? All these are commonplace, and therefore important, questions, which in many households become at one time or another burning ones; and while youth frets at restrictions, and cannot understand the meaning of this and that refusal, age is apt to

reason in the style, if not in the exact words, of the ancient saying, "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." That may be a very utilitarian way of regarding the matter; but the overwhelming proportion of men and women cannot afford to neglect the utilitarian aspect of things. Parents have cause for fear when they think they can discover in their children an incessant craving for pleasure which means a corresponding distaste for steady work—for that way improvidence, shiftlessness and eventual ruin lie; and who will deny that love of amusement, at the cost of duty, is one of the commonest causes of the undermining of character, of downfall and bitter sorrow?

We are all too familiar with these problems in the life of every day; that is the more reason for glancing at them anew, patiently and dispassionately. For here is the fact, that the play-instinct is native to us all, seeking for scope, and refusing to be denied; and we are rendering a poor service to religion if in its name we place all that side of human nature under a ban. It is a very unfortunate thing when the idea is inculcated that religion as such can take no cognisance of our pleasures, that they are at best beneath her notice, that our enjoyments are unpermitted, and must either be snatched in defiance of authority, or else reluctantly renounced; nothing, I am sure, is so much calculated to estrange young people from the Churches as the notion that they stand for a view of life which frowns upon happiness—a view from which they feel they must emancipate themselves and break away in obedience to a sheer necessity of their being. It is because religion has so often been presented or

misrepresented as an elderly pedagogue and pedant, ever ready to veto our longings and desires, that probably the last thing in our lives it occurs to us to sanctify is our playtime, our recreations, and the result is a great deal of very real paganism.

Now we want in the first place to get rid of this particular delusion, which still lurks in a good many people's minds as a fundamental conviction, viz., that religion and pleasure do not mix, that they are and must be antagonistic to each other: the moment we begin to divide life up into separate watertight compartments, the moment we think that there are certain parts of our activities—whether it be our business, or our politics, or our amusements—into which religion cannot enter, there is the possibility, and almost the prospect, of serious mischief ahead. For life is a unity, and the religion which does not apply to all its parts will not greatly influence any. Loud in professions of piety and contrition on Sunday—greedy and grasping in business during the week; anxious for the export of the Gospel to foreign regions, but far less anxious for its application at home; zealous for the least jot and tittle of correct doctrine, but strangely lax as regards correct practice—how woefully common such incongruities are, and how eagerly a sarcastic world notes them! Now it is just as incongruous to speak of God as the Maker of all, and yet to treat His creation and its appeals to us as a snare of the Devil, to be resisted and shunned; and a good deal of responsibility lies with the Church for having fostered so stupid and faithless a view. Think of a man like St. Simeon Stylites, seeking to please God by

elaborate and senseless self-torture, standing on his pillar exposed to all the inclemencies of the cold and rain; of a St. John of the Cross, making it a rule to renounce on principle all that was agreeable to the senses, and to embrace all that was repulsive; of even a fine spirit like Pascal, giving the advice, "Renounce every pleasure"! All this is in plain words to stigmatise the world as being the Devil's own province, from which it is the safest plan to withdraw into monkish retirement. Even the Reformation succeeded only partially in shaking off the Roman idea, which planted monasteries and convents everywhere as spiritual fortresses where alone men and women could really find security from the pursuits and ambushes of evil spirits. We have only very imperfectly learnt to believe so far that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and that the instinct which makes us seek and enjoy pleasure is as much and as truly God-given as the rest of our faculties.

How immeasurably truer than the monkish or Puritan view is the one embodied in the words, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from evil"! There is an entire philosophy, and a most wholesome philosophy, in that sentence. I say with all confidence and reverence that the God who made flowers fair and fragrant, who framed the frail symmetry of a snowflake, who made the glories of sunset, and gave that lovely colouring to ocean shells, shading from the most delicate pink to the deepest flush, is One who takes the keenest delight in beauty. I say that the God who implanted the love of play, the sheer exultation in movement and swift exercise, in all healthy,

natural creatures—fishes darting about in the clear water simply for the pleasure of it, birds playing elaborate games, dogs swimming out to fetch a stick, bringing it back, and saying to you as plainly as possible, "Do it again!"—the God who has created all this sense of joy in just being alive, and in the use of the faculties He has given to His creatures, is not One who frowns upon His children's pleasures, or feels affronted by that gladness which comes from being abundantly alive. Some years ago, after having spent a night in the Hospice on the St. Bernard, I saw early next morning the famous dogs being let out; and never shall I forget the exuberant joy with which the big creatures bounded forth, rolled over and over on the ice, lapped up the snow as their morning drink, and manifested in every possible way their conviction that this was a good world, in which it was a good thing to be alive. Why should we pretend to think the contrary, or attempt to make it so? It is, to say the least, paying God a singular compliment, to despise His creation, or to treat it as a trap to be avoided!

Here is the first truth to get firmly and clearly fixed in our minds—viz., that we need not steal our pleasures as from a niggardly miser who would withhold them from us, but rather receive pleasure and every other good gift and perfect boon as from above, so that we may be grateful to the Father for all innocent joys, and at the same time hallow them by the thought of the Giver of all. We want to remember that our Lord Himself no more shunned the harmless social feasts of His countrymen than He avoided the bedside of the suffering and afflicted; it was only the very doubtful

piety of the Pharisees which professed to be shocked because the Son of Man came eating and drinking.

And there is this further point to be borne in mind, that wherever you create a class of artificial sins, people will be driven to real ones; you cannot take a much more disastrous course than invest things that are legitimate and blameless in themselves with the unholy glamour of the forbidden. Who has not heard of cases—I admit they are rarer than they used to be—where novels had to be smuggled into the house as contraband, and read on the sly, or where an expedition to a theatre had to be a secret that could never be avowed? That is what Paul refers to when he speaks of the law as the strength of sin; he means the multiplication of prohibitions, which only resulted in rendering the prohibited thing attractive, and made people hug themselves with the guilty delight of having successfully broken bounds. I even wonder—if I may venture on an aside—whether as boys we should have been so eager to make ourselves ill by smoking the cheaper and deadlier brands of cigarettes, if it had not been for the appalling pains and penalties that were to keep us from the offence! Anyhow, it is worth pondering that Goethe draws his Faust as one who had practised every kind of austerity and abstinence enjoined by a gloomy religion whose watchword was, "Thou shalt renounce—renounce—renounce:" it was that that made him so ready to sell his soul to the Devil, and to plunge with gusto into every form of excess and low indulgence.

Well now, you see that I am not timidly "apologising" for pleasure, but justifying its right to a place

in every healthy life. And its chief justification is its function, which is to provide an opportunity for repairing the waste and loss of vitality which goes on, as in the body, so in the mind, where there are no intervals of play and relaxation. It is a good thing to have some form of exercise or amusement which will take the attention of the business man from his business, of the scholar from his books, of the toiler in the household—and men have no idea of the monotony of what they are pleased to call woman's sphere—from the routine of petty domestic details. Without something to take us effectually out of the daily round, our spirits get worn down, the spring goes out of us, our outlook becomes narrowed, and we gradually lose tone and elasticity. If there is to-day that marked increase in people's appetite for distractions and entertainments to which I referred, it is partly because the pressure of modern life is greater than has been known by any previous generation, and men and women fly instinctively to what will afford them relief from the stress of the conditions under which they work. That, at any rate, has to be taken into account, when we ask ourselves how it is that our grandparents so seldom laid claim to an annual vacation, and led so much quieter lives without the sense that they were missing anything, or were "hardly done by."

But now, if the justification of pleasure lies in what it does for us, in this building up of waste, one thing surely follows, viz., that we ought to take our pleasures in the form or forms in which they will really fulfil that important function. We will take it for granted that in merely crossing a busy thoroughfare to-day one is expending twice the amount of nervous energy as

formerly, and that hence there arises a real necessity of re-creating that energy, a need for recuperation, in order to fit ourselves for renewed effort and duty: that very fact judges the pleasures to which we have recourse, both as regards their quantity and quality. There is always the danger, to begin with, of sliding from moderate indulgence into immoderate; and while that is no reason for total abstinence, it is a very strong reason for keeping watch over oneself. That, no doubt, is in the old writer's mind when he states so roundly that "he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man;" he is thinking of the type—alas, not of an age, but of all time—which is really too busy pleasure-seeking to have time or attention to spare for the sordid business of earning a livelihood, or pursuing one's studies, or ordering a household aright. Let me suggest to you that when our hobbies, of whatever kind, and however innocent in themselves, begin to encroach upon our working hours—when we really become so absorbed in our games that our ordinary avocations and their demands upon our energies are resented as disagreeable interruptions—it is time to cry halt. I had a friend in the University, a most capable and even brilliant student, who failed in an important examination and lost a year, for one reason only—he was too completely engrossed in chess, turning what should have filled his spare hours into his main occupation—and since the examiners in the Honours School of Theology did not set chess problems, he fared—and failed—accordingly, and had to make a fresh and better start the following year. And you all remember Herbert Spencer's remark to a young fellow with whom he had engaged in a friendly game

of billiards: "Sir, such skill as you display, at your age, argues a wasted life."

The first thing, then, I plead for as all-important in this connection is *moderation* in our amusements; if in enjoying them we make ourselves less efficient for doing our life's work, both they and we stand condemned. I frankly do not think, *e.g.*, that it should be a minister's crowning ambition to reduce his golf-handicap. And this, too, we are sure to discover by experience, that pleasure unearned is pleasure unblest, and becomes the worst of boredoms: we have to acquire an appetite for relaxation by exertion, as we have to acquire an appetite for a meal by fasting. Pursue amusement, thinking of nothing else, as one sees some people doing, and I will for once assume the mantle of a prophet, and predict without hesitation that you will never run your quarry down. Not only is it obvious, as I said already, that you cannot be a very efficient surveyor, salesman, student or anything else, while you are chiefly interested in other things—but you will miss those other things as well.

Let me explain. The fullest pleasure, like the Kingdom of God, cometh not with observation, with careful planning and persistent seeking after; the harder we follow its fleeting shadow, the more surely the substance eludes our grasp. You don't believe it? Go over your own life, my brother, and if I am not very greatly mistaken, you will discover that those days on which you have tasted the very dregs of bitterness were days you had most carefully planned out for enjoyment; while certain other occasions stand out in your memory as red-letter days, full of happiness,

when you had made no special plans for being happy, but something just came along, gripped you by the arm, and seemed to say, "Come with me, and let me show you what satisfaction there lies in store for mortals when they do not seek for it!" So much is certain, that the one kind of life which is quite impossible is that which is stupidly called a life of pleasure. Call it a life of heart-ache, of brain-poverty, of appalling *ennui*, and we shall be nearer the mark; and all for the quite simple reason that pleasure is pleasure only by contrast with something else, and recreation is not recreation except on condition that there is something in us to be re-created, made whole again, and fitted for use.

First, then, moderation in pleasure; my second plea is for *elevation*. That is plain, assuredly. We are meant, I am firmly convinced, by the bountiful Giver of all good gifts, to have enjoyment visit us through all the avenues of sense and mind; but there is nothing that so much tests us as the *quality* of our enjoyments, just as nothing so surely brings out *our* essential quality. It is in our hours of ease, with only our own bent to follow, that we unconsciously furnish the true index to our characters. The Christian religion does not ask us to be ascetics, but it does ask to have a say in our playtime as well as in our worktime, because it claims to have dominion over the whole of life, not only over some selected departments of it. Now the Christian knows perfectly well that there are forms of amusement and diversion to which he will give a very wide berth, because they leave their votaries on a lower level, stained and degraded. When Ulysses, in the old

Greek legend, went after his companions in the palace of Circe, the enchantress skilled in the use of alluring and subduing spells, he found them changed into swine; and when she offered him her dainties, he declined, lest she should take his manhood from him. So there are excitements the Christian will shun, because he respects himself as the temple of the living God; there are dangers lurking in the "social glass," the "friendly hand at" this or that game for money, which he will recognise for what they are, and shun accordingly.

There is an extremely significant colloquial term, a phrase well worth looking at and examining, though we do not always use it in its literal sense—the phrase "played out." You come home from a hard day's toil, and you say, "I feel regularly played out." You have not played at all, you have worked; but by using that term you show your appreciation of the essential truth that play will wear us out more completely than any other form of exertion. And that applies more particularly, in a most sinister sense, to those kinds of amusement and indulgence to which we have just been alluding. Is there any sight much more unlovely, a more eloquent warning to all beholders, than the middle-aged man of pleasure, who is in the most real sense of the word "played out?" The sodden or sin-furrowed features; the lack-lustre eye; the hand a-tremble; the tell-tale, shambling gait, all speak of a reckless over-draft on the bank of life, leaving nothing but a picture of premature decay, with that in his glance every now and again which tells that he is in hell already. Hardship has slain its thousands, but unchecked passions and riotous appetites their tens of

thousands, taking their toll just among the gifted, the brilliant, the people of social charm, no one's enemies but their own. Poor Robert Burns, poor Phil May—and how many more one could cite. Wherefore rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart: but know thou that for all thy pleasures God will call thee to account—not because He is jealous of our joy and happiness, but because He bids us so to use the world as not abusing it. There are pure pleasures of which we shall never tire if we care to acquire a taste for them; pleasures of friendship and human society; pleasures inexhaustible of the mind, as springs of water whose waters fail not; pleasures in the silent companionship of nature, if we go to her beauties and wonders with an open eye and an open heart. In the old nature-myth it is said that the earth-born giant Antæus renewed his strength by every contact with his mother earth; shall not we, in communing with earth and sky and sea, feel refreshed by a veritable contact with our Father God, whose life pervades the life of all His works?

And that brings me to my last point, which is also practically the one on which I began, viz., the necessity for the *consecration* of our pleasures. The Christian, who is in the habit of submitting the rest of his activities to the judgment of God, will certainly not except his amusements. It is truly a paradox that people should think they can leave religion out of the matter when their quest is enjoyment; this is like dispensing with the services of your Alpine guide just when the path is getting more uncertain, the foothold more precarious, the ground more slippery—a course which nobody

pretending to ordinary good sense would take. Moderation, elevation, consecration—let these three elements be characteristic of our pleasures, and we shall be the better for them, returning from healthy play to healthy toil, braced and knit together, with the wastage repaired and fresh energy stored up for fresh tasks, ready for the better service of our Father and our brethren; for as our best joys are from Him, so they will surely and inevitably lead us to Him in whose presence is fulness of joy.

XXIV

THE HEART OF A CHILD

"The heart of a child."—PROV. xxii. 15.

WE have often, in these talks, had occasion to feel how small a difference the lapse of twenty-five centuries or so has made in the essentials, the warp and woof of human nature. The changes are principally changes of garb, expression, appearance; but in the main we found these maxims, gathered so long ago in a far-distant land, entirely applicable to our own circumstances. The same motives sway us, the same frailties beset us, the same trials vex us, as beset and swayed these Orientals of a bygone age; and the line which tells us that

> East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

is seen to be little more than a high-sounding superficiality after all.

But there is one respect, at least, in which we do feel conscious, and that sharply, of a diametrical difference between the outlook of these ancient sages and our own —or rather, perhaps, between that of the Old Testament and the New—and that is in the attitude of the Book of Proverbs to children. "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"—"diligently," as the margin more

literally puts it. "Withhold not correction from thy child: for if thou beat him with the rod he shall not die"—a cheery encouragement to some over-soft-hearted parent. Above all, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child: but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." All these utterances breathe a fervent belief in the virtue and wholesomeness of, let us say, drastic measures with children; there is in them no doubt of the parents' absolute authority; children are just naturally stupid and perverse, and the nonsense has to be knocked out of them—for their own good, no doubt, but also for the peace and comfort of much-tried grown-ups who have something better to do than to be bothered with unruly youngsters.

It is not too much to say that when we turn from the Book of Proverbs to the Gospel—when we read Christ's "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"—we are at one bound removed to a different climate, and almost to a different world, certainly a different world for children; when we ponder such an incident as His setting a child in the midst of His followers, and telling them that unless they became as little children, they should in no wise enter the Kingdom, we realise something of the revolution Jesus effected. From the Old Testament point of view the heart of a child was simply a synonym for a mass of foolishness, to be got rid of as speedily and as thoroughly as possible by the application of a stout cudgel; from the Christian point of view it is a thing of awe and wonder and infinite possibilities, an object at once of utmost tenderness and reverence. It is not

for nothing that in the lovely legend we see the wise men from the East laying their precious gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh at the foot of the cradle of the wondrous Child in whom all childhood has received a new consecration and dignity.

In taking these words, "The Heart of a Child" for my text and subject to-day, the first observation that occurs to one is how long the older, harsher view has maintained itself in practice as against the newer—how slowly Christ's conception of the child has made way against human hardness, unintelligence and woeful want of imagination. I believe it is the truth that for a long while people did not try to understand children, because they never thought that there was anything in them to be understood—they were to be made to obey without a question, to be "seen and not heard," to give as little trouble as possible, and on all occasions to show the greatest deference to their formidable elders. How much the people of a bygone day deprived themselves of by maintaining the ceremonial usage which made a son address his father in his letters as "Honoured Sir," and close with presenting his "dutiful respects"! Mr. William Canton, one of the most delightful interpreters of childhood, relates how, when he had told his little girl of these stiff formalities, she asked him, "Didn't they say 'Daddy' sometimes? Didn't they say it on Sunday, *for a treat*?" Alas, Sunday was apt to be less of a treat day than any other in the week for the mites of those stern and gloomy days!

And this notion of unlimited parental authority and a claim to unlimited filial submission lingers still in

some quarters—yes, even the strange delusion that whatever may be the parent's treatment of his children, he is somehow entitled to their respect and affection. It is quite natural that our modern dramatists should be hitting this mark again and again. "Do you know what is due to me as your father?" asks one of Mr. Shaw's characters of the grown-up daughter he has not seen since she was a tiny girl: "Duty, affection, respect, obedience!" Here is her reply: "I obey nothing but my sense of right. I respect nothing that is not noble. That is my duty. As to affection, it is not within my control." A hard lesson to learn all at once, no doubt, but an eminently salutary one: affection, even from our children, has to be won; respect, even from our children, has to be deserved. Suffer me to give you another illustration, from a recent play, of a temper which was universal at one time, and may still be met with. John Rutherford, junior, has stumbled upon an industrial discovery of enormous value, and seeing the chance of a lifetime, offers to sell it to his father, who badly needs such a lever to restore the prosperity of his firm; the older man nearly chokes with rage—"*Sell!*" he exclaims; "you talk o' selling to me when everything you'll ever make couldn't pay back the life I've given to you!" Now it won't do; children do not ask to have life given to them, and they might conceivably regard the gift as of doubtful value. And, to turn from fiction to fact, do we not know now, since the publication of Sir Sidney Lee's Life of King Edward, that Queen Victoria's theory of parental authority kept her son, far into middle age, in a condition of subordination which must have proved intensely galling to a man of his capacity?

The Heart of a Child

The heart of a child, in the first place, has to be won; and the task of winning, though happily not a difficult one, means that the child's nature has to be studied and understood. Everybody has known the tragedy of estrangements between parents and children, where the former did not try to understand, merely imposing their commands and exacting subordination. That is done sometimes with the best intentions, from a mistaken notion of discipline—but how it dries up the natural well of affection in a young soul, and how pathetic it is to see such a process of starvation! Once and for all, the child is not a property to dispose of, but a trust to administer, and of all trusts infinitely the most sacred. Again I say, the first duty is to understand; and I would add the first thing to understand is that the child is a separate individuality, a new creation of God, with rights to be respected, with a soul to be developed, a self that craves expression, and which it is a stupid cruelty to force into suppression. And then let us remember that a child is all imagination, all vitality, and to suppress childish mirth, childish high spirits, in the interests of "strictness," stunts, and may kill, something that is exceeding precious; as often as not, such strictness is merely another name for grown-up dulness and impatience. Do you know these lines?

In the house of "too much trouble"
  Lived a lonely little boy;
He was eager for a playmate,
  He was hungry for a toy.
But 'twas always "too much trouble,"
  "Too much dirt," and "too much noise,"
For the house of "too much trouble,"
  Wasn't meant for little boys.

And sometimes the little fellow
  Left a book upon the floor,
Or forgot and laughed too loudly,
  Or he failed to close the door.
In the house of " too much trouble "
  Things must be precise and trim—
In the house of " too much trouble "
  There was little room for him.

He must never scatter playthings,
  He must never romp and play,
Every room must be in order,
  And kept quiet all the day.
He had never had companions,
  He had never owned a pet—
In the house of " too much trouble "
  It is trim and quiet yet.

Every room is set in order,
  Every book is in its place,
And the lonely little fellow
  Wears a smile upon his face.
In the house of " too much trouble "
  He is silent and at rest—
In the house of " too much trouble,"
  With a lily on his breast.

No, it is not the child's " foolishness " that makes him play noisy games, and imagine wonderful things in the most homely surroundings, and tell himself tales of marvellous adventure, such as Robert Louis Stevenson, with his unequalled insight, has given us in his " Child's Garden of Verses ; " or if it be foolishness to our dull sight, it is akin to what the Apostle called the foolishness of God, which is wiser than men. And if we will only substitute sympathy for mere authority in our dealings with children, we may re-learn much that we had forgotten in the process of growing up.

For what is the truth about the heart of a child, and how are we to read it? I said we were to substitute sympathy for mere authority, but by sympathy I do not mean sentimentality. There is any amount of sugary sentimentalising over children, which does no good in the world, but is merely a form of self-indulgence. Children are not meant to be agreeable, pretty toys, or charming live dolls for their elders; and many a future character has been spoilt in the bud by treatment which regarded the child as something purely ornamental, by a bringing-up without seriousness of purpose, a period of youth in which there was no instilling of a sense of responsibility, of duty, of self-respect—ideas which the normal child is perfectly capable of understanding and responding to. That true sympathy which inspired our Saviour's estimate of young lives—an estimate which must have amazed His hearers—is always ultimately based upon respect, upon reverence for the wonder of personality which we can never fathom. These, we should never forget, are the men and women in the making, whom we are to fit for the life's work that will so soon devolve upon them; these represent all the possibilities which in a few short years will have unfolded into actualities, and over whose development we are charged with the sacred duty of watching and presiding to the best of our knowledge and power. When we reflect how much will be required of them by and by, what are the difficulties with which they will have to cope, the mistakes they will have to avoid, the pitfalls into which they will stumble unless they are forewarned—have they not the right, I say, to be at least moderately well equipped, moderately well prepared for life's

journey and conflicts? And let me express one conviction: what we do with the mind of a child, the intellectual training we give, counts, of course, for much; but what we do with the heart of a child, the training of character in those early, formative years, counts for everything. And while we may be very much deceived or disappointed in the merely intellectual results, which may prove unexpectedly and unaccountably meagre, we are seldom deceived or disappointed in the results that attend our efforts in the domain of character and the affections: if but the seed be good, we may almost invariably trust the soil.

The soil is almost invariably good—that is one of the chief things to insist upon; it is surely what Jesus indicated in the most striking manner when He pointed to a casual knot of village boys and girls—not "angelic" or æsthetic youngsters in the least—with the authoritative declaration, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." I do not forget the fact of heredity, the inborn proclivities that may be waiting, unsuspected, to assert themselves in the years of growth; nevertheless, generally speaking, the possibilities of good in a child outweigh the possibilities of evil immeasurably, asking only to be recognised and utilised. I have seen the assertion made in quite a recent work that Jesus taught that children, until baptism, were "possessed by Satan, in virtue of their natural birth;" one can only marvel at such an audacious mis-statement, and quote by way of answer the Lord's own words, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name, receiveth Me."

At one stroke those words scatter the gloomy fictions about original sin and man's natural depravity, whose effects need to be counteracted by the sacramental magic of baptism—that wretched superstition which has darkened the days of so many mothers mourning their unbaptised babes.

I assert, on the contrary, that the heart of a child is naturally accessible to all good and gracious influences. His instinct is to expect kindliness and goodwill. The child believes with all his heart that this is a good and friendly world, meant to be the scene of every kind of happiness and joyful activity. You get your occasional child of genius, like Marjorie Fleming, putting into verse, at the age of six, her intense delight in life :—

> Of summer I am very fond,
> And love to bathe into a pond ;
> I love the morning's sun to spy,
> Glittering through the casement's eye.
> The rays of light are very sweet,
> And puts away the taste of meat ;
> The balmy breeze comes down from Heaven,
> And makes us like for to be living—

wonderfully expressed, in truth, for a mere mite, but expressing after all only what all normal, healthy youngsters feel, though they lack the power of finding words for it. The prime capacity of children is a capacity for happiness and rejoicing in the earth with its manifold beauty ; and there are few sadder thoughts than that of little ones growing up herded together in densely-populated cities overhung by a pall of smoke, and with only the squalid streets for playgrounds. What a great living poet calls a "passionate necessity of joy" dwells in all children ; and by and by we shall see that a so-called civilisation which made children's lives

grey and joyless was a denial of the Gospel, and a sin against the Holy Spirit.

But, more than this, the heart of the normal child naturally responds to every fine sentiment, it has a spontaneous appreciation of generosity, compassionateness, bravery, unselfishness; there is no difficulty in appealing to its admiration for what is really admirable, or in engaging its sympathies with any fine and chivalrous action. There lies the real hope and promise in all character training; the educator has not to start with the task of expelling a mass of evil that is native to the childish spirit, as the writers of Proverbs would have us believe, but to take for granted the child's receptiveness for whatever is good and healthy. To people the youthful mind with stories of the heroic, of loyal devotion, of high attempts and courageous enterprises, is never difficult and always worth while, and the value of *this* kind of education is happily becoming ever more fully recognised. And just as important is it to instil a wholesome dislike of whatever is base in conduct, of all ugliness, meanness, underhandedness and the like in hearts that are so ready to be influenced for the better—influenced, I say, but not coerced. I tremble to think how much irreparable harm has been done by the opposite method, based on the idea that children's wills had to be "broken," that the main business of their guardians was to "check" them, to employ that famous "rod" which was to drive their "foolishness" far from them. Of course there is room and necessity for correction, reproof, discipline, for it is no good to delude ourselves by seeing boys and girls through rose-coloured clouds of sentimentalism; but

the only correction which avails is that which is inwardly approved by the small delinquents' own sense of justice—a sense which is apt to be remarkably strong and keen. We have smiled together ere now over the Rugby boy's outspoken comment on Dr. Temple, the Head Master: "Temple's a beast, but he's a just beast." That was evidently one of the secrets of his remarkable influence—the conviction he inspired in the many hundreds of lads who passed through his hands, that even in punishing them for their pranks and misdemeanours he was determined to act fairly, and could be trusted not to pass the bounds of what the transgressor himself would, in his heart, acknowledge to be justice.

And might I say here, by way of filling in this imperfect analysis of a child's heart, that if it possesses an intense capacity for happiness, it possesses a corresponding one for its opposite; if it is only too willing to unfold and respond to love, it is bitterly hurt by the want of it, keenly sensitive to unkindness. No greater mistake than to imagine that the sorrows of little ones are therefore little in themselves; or that because their occasions are trifling from our point of view, they are felt by them as trifles; on the contrary, this lost ball, or that damaged engine are big things, filling the horizon and mattering immensely. I know of a child of four who was told by his mother how in hurrying along the street she had accidentally trodden upon and spoilt some little urchin's penny toy, and the piteous wail he set up; I remember to this day the impression made upon the child who heard the story, how all on a sudden the joy seemed to have gone out of things, how he went to bed with a heavy heart, and how for a long time

afterwards the memory of that trivial tragedy, to which he never dared allude, sufficed to give him a keen twinge of pain. In writing upon a young soul, we are writing on most delicate material, capable of retaining every slightest impression, like the plastic cylinders that take a phonograph record; and a really unhappy childhood is so great a misfortune that, in my belief, no subsequent happiness can efface it or make up for it. Once more there rises before the mind the vision of hapless children acquainted before their time with the trials and troubles of life, with poverty and the fight for daily bread, with intemperance and sin, with cruelty and neglect; and indignation struggles with marvel that such things should be—that we should still, for the sake of miserable gain, and because their labour is cheap, exploit and stunt the bodies and souls of Christ's little ones. May I condense all I feel on the subject into one sentence: If we can only secure a happy childhood to a girl or boy, we are sowing a seed which will surely bear its fruit, we are laying a foundation that will stand, we are endowing them with that good part which shall by no means be taken away from them.

What, in conclusion, shall we say of the share of religion in the heart of a child? If we are wise, I think, we shall say little, and that little cautiously. So much is quite sure, that young hearts are naturally religious, accessible, as to all good influences, to this, the highest of all; so much also is sure, that it is futile, and worse, to introduce those tender, unformed minds to the aridities and subtleties of speculative doctrine. They have no difficulty in responding to the simple teaching of God as their Father, of Jesus as their loving

Friend; no need to trouble them with a scholastic, dogmatic theology, which can only serve to cloud the vision of childhood. "What are you doing?" a mother asked her little boy of three, as he stood gazing out of the window one night; unhesitatingly the reply came back—"I am smiling at God; I can't see Him, but He can see me." "Smiling at God"—ah, if we could smile at Him, like children, trustfully and confidingly, would He not smile at us? "Out of the mouth of babes He perfecteth praise."

"Come, let us live for the children," cried the noble-hearted Fröbel, in words which have never ceased to echo and inspire, "Come," writes the wise and homely poet,

Come to me, O ye children!
  For I hear you at your play,
And the questions that perplexed me
  Have vanished quite away.

Ye open the eastern windows,
  That look towards the sun,
Where thoughts are singing swallows,
  And the brooks of morning run.

Ah, what would the world be to us
  If the children were no more?
We should dread the desert behind us
  Worse than the dark before.

For what are all our contrivings,
  And the wisdom of our books,
When compared with your caresses,
  And the gladness of your looks?

Ye are better than all the ballads
  That ever were sung or said;
For ye are living poems,
  And all the rest are dead.

XXV

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF PROVIDENCE

"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."—PROV. xvi. 33.

HAVE you ever, in a collected hour, and aided by a good memory, gone over the events of your own life—gone over them in some little detail? To many people there comes at some time either a period of enforced inactivity, or some critical juncture, which makes their thoughts range over the past, turning its yellowed leaves, stopping a little here and sighing a little there, with now a half-sad smile and now a sharp twinge of regret, and once or twice the recollection of a great joy which even yet sheds its radiance over the page. If you have ever indulged in such a survey, you must have been struck with one thing—the unexpectedness, the incalculableness of life, the utterly unforeseen and seemingly trifling circumstances that proved to be decisive, as a drop of water falling this side or that of the Great Divide will be carried to the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean. Now and again we seem to come upon an instance to the contrary; of Mr. Asquith I have been told by someone likely to know the truth, that his mother said to him in boyhood—"Only one of two things for you, Herbert: the Premiership or the Lord Chancellorship of England!"—and with steady steps and fixed gaze he marched toward the goal which

to most people would have seemed quite unrealisably far off. But such cases are altogether exceptional; in our own life-stories the undesigned, the seemingly accidental, has played a very considerable, it may be a predominant part. Had you not had this chance introduction to such-and-such a person; had you but gone down this road instead of that on a certain day; had you postponed some visit, which was not at all pressing, by twenty-four hours—how differently the course of your subsequent existence would have run!

Or do we tell ourselves that if we are so influenced by things that come from without, it must be because we are of feeble will and slight material? Well, no one will bring that charge against two men who were born within a few years of each other, and destined each to leave deep marks in the history of religion—Luther and Loyola: yet what turned the former to a religious career—what caused him to enter the monastery from which he emerged to challenge the Pope—was a narrow escape from being struck by lightning; while what made Loyola from a soldier and courtier into the founder of the Jesuit order, was the cannon ball which laid him low as he stood on the walls of Pampeluna. Men of iron will and mighty genius they both were, but the occasion, the impulse, which brought out their genius and gave direction to their will, they neither created, nor foresaw, nor resisted. Think as highly as we will of our own initiative, of our power to deal with the materials life supplies us withal, the extent to which unforeseen circumstances have shaped our course must touch the most confident at times with a strange humility, and make him echo the old words, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

This is a thought which in one form or another we meet time after time in Scripture, a warning against human complacency and presumption, a rebuke to the self-sufficient temper to which a little success is apt to make us prone. "As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, even so thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all. . . . Thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"—how trite a reflection, with Christ's parable of the wealthy farmer, dreaming of bigger barns and store-houses, and suddenly summoned by God, as a comment upon it! And here is yet another passage, to which I would this morning particularly direct your attention: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." You have it all there in that image. The seeming uncertainty, the incalculableness of life, as fortuitous to all appearance as the cast of the lot or the throw of the dice—yet behind it all the overruling Providence of God, ordaining, guiding, fulfilling itself.

That, I say, is the whole theory of the religious life, nominally accepted by all religious people; the question is, do we really believe in this Providence of God, of which we talk lightly and thoughtlessly enough as a rule? You see, throughout this whole course of sermons, we have been driving at practice, the religion of doing—and very rightly, for it is doing that matters in the every-day, the give-and-take, of life; but to-day it may be useful to insist on what is often forgotten, viz., that all practice, after all, rests on theory; that our manner of living depends inevitably on our way

of looking at life, that doing, in a word, is conditioned by thinking. How are we to think on this all-important matter? The question goes down to the very roots, and it will repay us to reflect carefully upon the subject.

At first sight it looks as if there could be only two possible answers, and no more; either, that is to say, everything is governed by blind, unconscious accident, or, on the other hand, everything, down to the minutest details, is decreed in advance by God, and falls out precisely as He has fore-ordered it from before the foundations of the world. Now, unless I am quite mistaken, neither of these views is tenable—both involve insuperable obstacles, and we shall have to try and find one that differs from both.

Can we, in the first place, really believe in the supremacy of accident? We have spoken of the unexpectedness of life, of the way in which circumstances so small as to appear almost negligible prove turning-points in our history; how we find ourselves insensibly, and all but unconsciously, drawn into associations which determine all our subsequent careers; how we are woven into patterns not of our choosing, moulded all the time by forces we do not so much as suspect; how our carefully-drawn plans are lightly blown on one side by some mere chance breeze sprung up from nowhere; how, in fine, before us all lies the unborn, unknown morrow, with its unguessed possibilities. What follows from all this? Well, if what follows is that all is hap and hazard, that Caprice is King, such a conclusion, I confess, would be infinitely

dispiriting and depressing, it would be calculated to paralyse all effort and endeavour. If we are as helpless as all that, then who are we—the reflection would be inevitable—that we should measure our feeble strength against the mighty currents that sweep us along, the influences which set and leave their stamp upon us? What is the use of trying to lay our course in this or that direction, if we are merely the sport of wind and waves, and our own initiative counts for so little as to be practically a negligible quantity? There are any number of people who go about weighed down by this belief that all is chance, all is incalculable circumstance, against which it is no use fighting; and because they do not put up a fight, they really become what they believe themselves to be—at the mercy of accident, driven about with every wind, and somehow the winds are always adverse, and never drive them into port. "The chapter of accidents," Mr. Asquith once said, "is the Bible of fools;" he might have said, it is the creed of every failure—it is the belief which makes men fail as surely as cold makes water freeze. Against that dismal notion the heart of man has always instinctively protested; no, says an inner intuition, it is not chance which rules and determines our fate, but all the seeming-tangled threads are in the wise and almighty hands of the Ruler and Governor of the Universe; we know little even of the present and near-to-hand, and nothing at all of the future, but—

> behind the dim Unknown
> Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

So then, with that we turn to the other alternative of which we spoke a moment or two ago—the one which

asserts that whatever happens in the world takes place according to the Almighty Will which has so ordained and predetermined it. When that faith is religiously held, and when the Almighty Will which fixes our lot is believed to be also all-good, it is easy to see the power such a belief has to comfort and sustain the soul, to make life endurable when the sky is overclouded, to colour sorrow and pain with hope for the better future. Such a faith will nerve, and many a time has nerved, men and women to do the right and hold fast to principle against tremendous odds, enabling them to feel that they were ranging themselves on the side of that Providence which would not allow them to be put to confusion, but would protect and save them to the uttermost. It is this conviction which has given its tremendous force and driving power to the doctrine of predestination—the sense that what we behold at work is not the play of soulless accident, but the prevailing will of the Most High, which is without variableness or shadow of turning. When men believe that they are the instruments of an invincible Power, they become themselves invincible; this was the secret of the Covenanters and of Cromwell's Ironsides; and this has been the secret and the consolation of many a soul fighting its solitary battle against poverty, misjudgment, hardship, disappointment—the sense that God held the clue to the maze, and that He would by no means forsake His servant—the feeling, "If God be for us, who is there against us?" Past all power of computation, this faith has upheld men in adversity, lifted them above despair, enabled them to suffer cheerfully for righteousness' sake, made them more than conquerors, because they felt assured all the time

that they were on the conquering side; they could afford to bide their time, feeling, no doubt, that "the path of the righteous is as the light of dawn, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Such faith is itself the earnest of victory.

And yet such a faith in an absolute predestination, the moment it is seriously thought out, presents its difficulties, from which there seems no escaping. Can we really think that this world, with all its tale of ill, is precisely as God would have it to be? You may remember that a little while ago it was the fashion in certain circles to maintain rather aggressively that "there is no will but God's will"; that nothing happens or can happen contrary to His ordinance; that whatever we do, we are expressing and giving effect to the Divine decrees; and we were bidden to acknowledge adoringly that nothing could befall a single human soul but what was in some way "God's sacrament of love" to it. Well, how does that kind of thing work out practically? If everthing that happens fulfills His will, because there is no other, then how can anything be a sin? If all the time, while we think we are acting upon our own initiative, we are in reality moved by invisible strings, which He is holding, how are we in any wise free or responsible for any of our acts, either good or bad, since these and no other were the acts we could not help committing? If the whole spectacle of human action is the manifestation of His energy, then the rogue no less than the righteous, the oppressor no less than his victim, the self-indulgent as much as the self-sacrificing, may lay the flattering unction to their souls that they are simply obeying the

Divine behest—indeed, can do no other. Is that a position in which we can rest? I remember a small boy of six saying to his father, who was entertaining him with a tale, "God always knew—long before ever you were in the world—that you would make that up for me some day." Well, perhaps so; but did God also foreknow and foreordain that some hapless human being, as yet unborn, should some day commit such and such a crime, and suffer the dire penalty for it? Are we really, in the Persian poet's phrase,

> But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
> Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;
> Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays,
> And one by one back in the Closet lays?

In that case, shall we not have to continue in the same strain, and address Him thus:

> O Thou who didst with Pitfall and with Gin
> Beset the Path I was to wander in,
> Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
> Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin?

If we believe in Providence to this full extent, are we not brought back to the same old feeling that it is no use trying to be or do one thing rather than another, since we *can* only be or do what He ordains—and "who withstandeth His will?"

And even that is not all the difficulty we have to encounter. We read of disasters of the sea and of the mine—one taken and another left, and none dare hint that the rescued were necessarily better than those who perished—was it all God's decree? At the time of the Dock Strike we read of ghastly distress in the East-end of London, tens of thousands of men, women and children in the grip of hunger, apparently, so

far as one could judge, largely owing to the stubbornness of one man ruthlessly wielding his power—was that God's will? We learn of the fiendish cruelties perpetrated on the defenceless natives in the rubber plantations of the Putumayo region of Peru, and while we are stirred to horror and indignation against these sickening abominations, we also ask, "If these are the ways of Providence, what kind of Providence is it which allows such things?" And all on a sudden we discover definitely that our providential theory has broken down; in the interests of religion itself we dare not push it so far.

What then? we ask, genuinely baffled, since neither of our two alternatives seems to fit this bewildering scheme of things as they are—since we instinctively reject the notion of making God responsible for all the sin and sorrow of the earth, for all the blood and tears that are being shed under the sun? Your preacher is not presumptuous enough to imagine that he has anything like a complete answer to offer to these questions, neither is it at all to be expected that man's feeble understanding should be able to fathom the counsel of the Lord; but he can attempt at least one or two suggestions towards a partial solution.

To begin with, this world cannot be the plaything of accident, because it obviously is not the outcome of accident. There is nothing chaotic, capricious, unreliable about the operations of the forces of nature. The millionth combination of the same chemical substances in the same proportions will yield the same result as the first. The eclipse predicted by astronomers for a certain date comes neither a day too soon nor too late. The

filaments of all the thousand varieties of snow-crystals form angles of exactly 60 to 120 degrees, neither more nor less. That does not look like arbitrariness or want of control at the centre of things. But there is more than this. All we have learnt of the world's past history shows us not only order but purpose at work, a steady progress toward something more and better. What science calls evolution is only another term for the unceasing action of Providence on a cosmic scale, a deliberate working towards a foreseen and predetermined aim, the gradual unfolding of a vast and majestic design. Once upon a time the highest forms of life were huge crabs and shellfish. They were succeeded by gigantic reptiles and flying saurians. Still later came the age when immense mammals, now extinct, lorded it over creation. And finally, in the fulness of time, after many intervening stages of development, came man, beginning ever so little above the higher ape, and ascending through savagery to civilisation, till he could think the thoughts of God again after Him. No chance in all this process, but design, purpose, in one word, Providence; yet who but the Creator Himself could have foretold the end from the beginning in the floating speck of jelly in which all organic life originated?

And now let me ask a question: Is it likely that the Divine Intelligence, having evolved man with infinite skill and patience, should care nothing for this, its highest earthly product? Should we not expect the One who has had the whole disposing of the lot through all the æons still to continue His guidance and oversight when the human level has been reached? If it is plainly Providence that has directed the whole

movement which culminates in humanity, how can we think that at the final stage Providence turns into indifference? Surely, He who has watched over creation from the beginning, who designed the petals of wayside flowers, who tints the butterfly's wing, is not indifferent to the fate of the beings whom He has made a little lower than Divine, and crowned with glory and honour. He has not brought us so far merely to forget all about us at the end.

But God's Providence, just because it is wise, is steadfast; its laws of nature endure, and He will not miraculously interfere with them; they are to be mastered by being learnt and obeyed. And Divine Providence is no cheap substitute for human improvidence. God will not perform a miracle to strengthen the stand which the carpenters have scamped; He will not raise a crop from the untilled field; He will not put a premium on careless engineering by making shoddy machinery yield as good results as that which has been conscientiously built; He will not catch the reckless climber in mid-air, or suspend the action of natural law for our individual benefit. Bear that well in mind, that we have to give up our nursery notions of a Providence which is fussing round and interfering, and to substitute for it that of an August Mind which abides by its decrees and is steadfast in its purposes, which it is for us to learn and conform to.

And in the second place, God does not intervene in the detailed use we make of His gift of freedom—else were it not freedom at all. Our liberty is providentially bestowed, but not the employment we choose to make of it. Foolish to charge heaven with man's misdeeds, foolish to imagine that our sins and the evil

we inflict upon ourselves and each other, lie at Heaven's door, or were fore-ordered by the Most High. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good," but He contents Himself with the showing: He asks for a free, not a forced obedience, and holds us responsible for our choice. True, this gift of liberty involves much sorrow and suffering; but only by the exercise of free will can character be formed, and we know that sorrow and suffering—while we would not choose them for their own sakes—have often and often been the means of bringing out the finer qualities of men and women.

And yet He does not let us go our own way; He stands aside, but only a little way aside, watching all the while, and holding the issue in His mighty hands. You cannot have read history or individual experience without coming to the conclusion that here and there, unperceived at the time, but none the less real, was God's guiding, God's restraining influence. Some deep grief which at the time almost crushes us, proves an inspiration; some pitiful tragedy which wrings our heart, is the starting-point of triumph; our light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory. A Mrs. Josephine Butler's loss of a beloved daughter makes her devote herself to the rescue of other mother's daughters from a fate worse than death; John Brown is shot at Harper's Ferry for his anti-slavery principles, but his soul goes marching on, and his memory serves to win liberty for the slaves of America; Jesus is nailed to a shameful Cross, and that Cross becomes the power of God unto salvation. "Who is he that will harm you if ye be zealous of that which is good?" we read in the first Epistle of Peter—and the question sounds a mockery: why,

the evil will harm us, and make us suffer! But go on to the next verse; the writer knew all about *that*—he saw on every hand the persecution the Christians were undergoing: "but and if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake," he continues, "blessed are ye." Not exemption from sorrow, but the strength that triumphs over sorrow, is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Brethren, our times are in His hands; behind the maze of events stands He who "hath made everything for His own end," and who will not let us use even the freedom He has endowed us withal to our utter destruction. For a little while, like foolish children, we may, by our self-will, obstruct and thwart His Will, but the final outcome can never be in doubt, and every now and again, in our moments of deeper insight and wider survey, there

> gleams upon our sight
> Thro' present wrong the Eternal Right.

His purposes to us-ward may be hindered—ay, hindered by us—but cannot be defeated. The lot falleth into the lap, thus or thus, incalculably, but the whole—the *ultimate*—disposing thereof is of the Lord. There is an overruling Wisdom on which we may surely rely; to trust in it, to discern it, to co-operate with it, that is *our* wisdom, the wisdom of a heart taught by Christ Jesus.

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